

BULLETIN OF ECUMENICAL THEOLOGY

ISSN 0794-8670

Vol. 28 2016

**RELIGIONS OF AFRICA AND THE ECOLOGY:
STRATEGIZING FOR ENVIRONMENTAL
PROTECTION**

**PUBLISHED
BY
The Ecumenical Association of Nigerian Theologians**

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SUBSCRIPTION RATES

Nigeria	- 500.00 per issue
Foreign	- US\$30 (€30) per annum (air mail postage included)

Payments overseas: in Euro: Congregazione dello Spirito Santo (Attn. BETH):
Casa Generalizia; Clivo di Cinna, 195; 00136, Roma, Italia

Payments in USA Dollars: Congregation of the Holy Spirit (Attn. BETH):
Trinity Hall, 600 Forbes Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15282, USA.

BULLETIN OF ECUMENICAL THEOLOGY

Bulletin of Ecumenical Theology is published by the Ecumenical Association of Nigerian Theologians (EANT), and printed in Nigeria by SNAAP Enugu. EANT is indebted to SIST for affording it facilities to continue publishing the Bulletin.

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NOTE TO CONTRIBUTORS:

The Ecumenical Association of Nigerian Theologians was founded in 1986 by pastors, university and seminary professors from mainline Christian churches. The objective is to critically reflect on and search for ways of establishing dialogue in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious nation like Nigeria. The pressure in 1986 came from the upgrading of Nigeria to full membership in the Organization of Islamic Conference. The focus of the association expanded from Muslim-Christian relations to interdisciplinary research—bringing together scholars from disciplines such as political science, history, law, economics, sociology, philosophy, psychology and anthropology, religious studies and theology—to engage in creative conversation for the good of Nigeria, Africa, the diaspora and the world. This is the focus of the *Bulletin of Ecumenical Theology* published since 1987.

Contributors, invited or voluntary, should have an eye on the multi-disciplinary interest of the *Bulletin*. Submissions are in English, but the editorial board and consultants have facility for translating from French to English.

STYLE

Articles, peer-reviewed by two editors, should be between 6000 to 10000 words in length; and are submitted online, MSWORD format, to the editor, *Bulletin of Ecumenical Theology*: ecunigeriantheologians@gmail.com;
ecumenical_nigerian_theologians@hotmail.com.

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Volume 28 (2016): Religions of Africa and the Ecology

CONTENTS

Augustin Ramazani Bishwende

Capitalist Multinationals in the Disruption Of The
Ecosystem in Africa 5

David T. Ngong

The Environment, Population, And Theology:
A Perspective From Cameroon 22

Emmanuel Osigwe

Justice and Reconciliation In The Niger Delta Of Nigeria: Exploring
Insights From Catholic Social Thought 48

Peter C. Phan

Care for Our Common Home,
Ecology and the Catholic Church in Asia 68

Daniel P. Scheid

Laudato Si': A North American Perspective 88

FEATURES 105

Helene Büchel, Marlene Montes de Sommer and Elisabeth Steffens

De-Philosophising Philosophy: A Gift In Honour Of
Raúl Fornet-Betancourt On The Occasion Of His 70th Birthday 106

BOOK REVIEWS 123

Cyril Orji, "A Semiotic Approach to the Theology of Inculturation. Eugene OR,
Pickwick Publications, 2015.

Irfan A. Omar and Michael K. Duffey (Eds), *Peacemaking and the Challenge of
Violence in World Religions*. Maiden, Massachusetts & Oxford, Blackwell, 2015

Salim Faraji. *The Roots of Nubian Christianity Uncovered: The Triumph of the
Last Pharaoh: Religious Encounters in Late Antique Africa*. Trenton: Africa
World Press, 2012.

*Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí, The Invention of Women : Making an African Sense of
Western Gender Discourses*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997

CAPITALIST MULTINATIONALS IN THE DISRUPTION OF THE ECOSYSTEM IN AFRICA

Augustin Ramazani Bishwende¹.

Abstract

In the context of globalization, the debate over climate change has become a global affair. Many forums have been organized on this subject. The latest to date occurred in 2015, organized by the French president Francois Hollande who summoned all global leaders concerned by this debate to Paris. The primary objective of all these forums is to think and think again about how to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Nevertheless, the debate concerning global gas emissions does not seem to denounce, in Africa or the world, the ravages of multinational companies that by their open-air extraction of raw materials and deforestation pollute the planet, cause floods due to torrential rains, destabilize agricultural production, augment poverty and hunger in Africa, create inequalities between the North and the South—in short, disrupt the ecosystem in general. *Although each country requires self-governance and policies regarding the struggle against global warming, is it possible that multinational companies are raising awareness in order to become more involved in this civic battle to assume their responsibility by working for lasting development of the planet while also following their own economic interests?*

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Introduction

Climate change has become, and during the 21st century will continue to be, a topical subject at the centre of all the challenges that will continue to mobilize many of the world's countries, particularly those in the West and those that are developing. But in our current context of globalization, the debate is becoming a global affair of all countries, North as well as South, East as well as West. Many forums have been organized around the topic of climate change. The latest to date is the twenty-first conference on climate change (from November 30 to December 11, 2015). French president Francois Hollande summoned all leaders around the world concerned by this debate to Paris. The primary object of all these forums is to think and think again about how to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (especially CO₂).

Nevertheless, the debate concerning global warming does not seem to denounce, in Africa or the world, the ravages of multinational companies that by their open-air extraction of raw materials and deforestation pollute the planet, cause floods due to torrential rains, destabilize agricultural production, augment poverty and hunger in Africa, create inequalities between the North and the South—in short, disrupt the ecosystem in general. “Situated predominantly in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, poverty-stricken populations are often accused of being the source of environmental degradation; they are perceived to be the producers of the pollution and urban chaos in which poverty forces them to live. However, the poor are not directly responsible for the environmental degradation that is attributed to them: as the first victims of environmental deregulation, they are even behind movements to protect the environment . . . the most polluting practices, especially in terms of greenhouse gas emissions, consumption of meat, etc.-, require a level of wealth that disadvantaged people hardly possess. The poor, far from being the most polluting, are the first victims of environmental

degradation.”² For this reason, *although each country requires self-governance and policies regarding the struggle against global warming, is it possible that multinational companies are raising awareness in order to become more involved in this civic battle to assume their responsibility by working for lasting development of the planet while also following their own economic interests?* In this article we will start from three case studies of West and Central Africa: the Ivory Coast, Ghana, and the Democratic Republic of Congo that show how multinational companies are destroying the African ecosystem. We will also show how they can participate in the global effort of fighting against global warming while also pursuing their economic interests. Next, the reductions in greenhouse gas emissions are not only the business of large mining, gas, oil, and forestry companies; they also rest with African heads of state and governments who must promote policies in order to preserve the ecosystem. Finally, in order to struggle against global warming, responsibility rests with all the citizens of the world, in patience and self-governance, to become involved and work so that our Planet Earth may be habitable for all.

A. Multinational Companies: Three Case Studies: Ivory Coast, Ghana, Democratic Republic Of Congo

1. The Case of the Ivory Coast

Relying on the report of the UN’s special reporter Mr Okechukwu Ibeanu, Lucille Maertens attests bitterly to the harmful consequences of the flow of toxic products and waste on the enjoyment of human rights, that “one exports to the South the dangerous waste that one does not want to deal with in the

²MAERTENS L., Les pauvres à la merci des dégradations environnementales, *Un monde d’inégalités. L’État du monde 2016*, Paris: La Découverte, 2015, p. 140-141.

industrialized nations. That is what happened during the case of the *Probo Koala*,³ a tanker under the Panamanian flag that emptied toxic waste arriving from Europe in the port of Abidjan, causing emanations of deadly gas that killed 15 people and affected thousands of others.”⁴ This spill of toxic waste took place on August 19 and 20, 2006 in the Ivory Coast. The Ivorian waste-handling firm Tommy as subcontractor of this program spilled 528m3 of highly toxic waste at Akouedo, in the open air, and at several other dozens of highly populated sites. Even though about ten people died following contact with the deadly gases emanated by this toxic waste, more than 100,000 people were poisoned and contaminated. These latter had recourse to medical care for symptoms ranging from skin irritations to vomiting, from respiratory difficulties to chemical burns (precisely 43,492 cases of confirmed poisoning and 24,825 probable cases, cf. Report of the National Institute for Public Hygiene of the Ivory Coast, cited by Greenpeace and Amnesty International, 2012, 233 p. 54). According to the opinion of specialists on the subject, unless the

³ The case of the *Probo Koala* is an environmental catastrophe that occurred in the Ivory Coast in September 2006, and that caused the death of 17 people and the poisoning of tens of thousands of people: 43,492 cases of confirmed poisoning and 24,825 of probable poisoning, according to INHP (the National Institute for Public Hygiene), cited by Amnesty International. It takes its name from the oil tanker that transported waste to the Ivory Coast in August 2006. The *Probo Koala*, whose crew is Russian, is an oil tanker registered in Panama, belonging to a Greek company and chartered by the Dutch and Swiss company Trafigura. Although Trafigura has until present refused to recognize its responsibility, the company was judged responsible and condemned by a Dutch tribunal on December 23, 2011. In August 2006, this multi-purpose bulk carrier discharged at the port of Abidjan 581 tons of toxic waste (a mix of oil, hydrogen sulfide, phenols, caustic soda, and sulfurated organic compounds). These last, spread onshore in the dumping site and doubtless mixed with acid, caused emanations of deadly gas. Wikipedia.

⁴ MAERTENS, L., *Ibidem*, p. 143-144. *Translator's Note*: the author confirms that 17 people were actually killed, not 15 as claimed by Maertens.

waste had been decontaminated,⁵ the consequences will be much more serious and harmful in the long term on the health of the population of Abidjan.⁶ “At the outset, the elimination of the waste should have taken place at the Port of Amsterdam, but Trafigura estimated that the cost of its treatment under safe conditions—500,000 euros—was too high. Five attempts later—at Malta, in Italy, at Gibraltar, in France, and in Nigeria—the firm Tommy, a private Ivorian company contracting with Puma Energy, proposed to get rid of the waste for 13,000 euros. [...] Amnesty International qualified the incident as “one of the largest industrial catastrophes of the 21st century. The inhabitants fear that the effects of the pollution will continue to be felt today and emotions are still high”⁷ in Abidjan.

This first known case of an international environmental scandal in the 21st century presents itself as a concrete example of responsibility that capitalist multinational companies hold for the health of the global population. But if these toxic products are not wanted in Europe where they are produced, why spill them on the African continent? Is this dumping of toxic waste not a continuation of the old predatory practices of Europe which does not hesitate, according to its own economic and capitalist interests, just like the period of the slave trade and colonization, to dehumanize Africa by considering it a dumping ground for its industrial waste? Doesn't this spill show that Europe continues to believe the myth of the inequality of races and to consider other people, and Africans in particular, as sub-humans who can die like flies without any guilt being incurred? Isn't it a concrete example

⁵ Unfortunately, this toxic waste has never been adequately decontaminated. Cf. VALUSSI R., Dix ans après l'affaire *Probo Koala*, les affaires toxiques continuent en Cote d'Ivoire, 16 MARS 2016, multinationales.org/Dix-ans-apres-l'affaire-Probo-Koala-les-affaires-toxi.

⁶ International Federation for Human Rights, L'Affaire du *Probo Koala* ou la catastrophe du versement des déchets toxiques en Cote d'Ivoire, <https://www.fidh.org/...FIDH-LIDHO>.

⁷ VALUSSI R., Dix ans après l'affaire *Probo Koala*, les affaires toxiques continuent en Cote d'Ivoire, 16 MARS 2016.

of economic globalization, a new form of colonization that poisons, kills, and sacrifices thousands of human lives in the name of Capital? Does one have the right to ignore the justice due to those vulnerable States and peoples? Does the Charter of the United Nations not proclaim the fundamental equality of the rights of men and women as well as those of large and small nations (Preamble)? Doesn't it posit the principle of sovereign equality of all its members (art.2.1)? It does not suffice to only rake in the profits of industrial activities. Is it not also necessary to work for a proper industrial economy that does not poison humanity but rather respects the dignity of the human person without regard for his or her humble origins, race, and state citizenship, however vulnerable? In fact, "throughout the entire globe, the poor are more exposed than others to the effects of pollution and toxic and dangerous waste. In other words, on the global scale between States, as well as on the national scale, one finds environmental and sanitary inequalities equally".⁸

2. The Case of Ghana

If the Ivory Coast recently experienced an industrial and environmental catastrophe hitherto unknown to the 21st century, Ghana constitutes a scandal of the largest unloading of electric and electronic products in the world. "The Ghanaians who are located in Europe and the United States salvage old computers and send them by boat to the port of Tema where wholesalers buy up the stock. The machines are then transported to the dump of Accra where buyers salvage them to be burned by children."⁹ Ghana has become the champion in collecting, recycling, and dismantling electronic products that would provide a living wage to around

⁸ PELLOW D. and BRULLE R., cited by MAERTENS L., *art. cit.*, p. 144.

⁹ To know more see <http://www.geo.fr/environnement/actualite-durable/le-ghana-poubelle-les-e-dechets-25740#rpMrf2qpAvxAipYR.99>.

30,000 people according to a report published in February by the secretariat of the Basel Convention on the cross-border movements of dangerous waste and by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). This electronic waste comes from the European continent and the United States of America. The young adolescents of Accra busy themselves with stripping thousands of unusable computers, outdoors in unhealthy waste, to find copper that they can sell on the foreign market. This commerce has been qualified as illegal but tolerated with incalculable and dramatic consequences for the health of the workers as well as the environment. The children of Agogbloshie Market are exposed to toxic waste that is dangerous to their health such as lead, mercury, cadmium, polyvinyl chloride (pvc) . . . that can damage their nervous system, bloodstream, reproductive organs, kidneys and bones ... From morning to evening, they handle toxic electric and electronic products for a paltry salary and without protection (neither masks nor gloves). They pass their days in the midst of carcinogenic chemical products that can cause respiratory, cardiovascular, and dermatological problems ... What is more, toxic electric and electronic waste that is not salvaged by youth is burned and contaminates the environment. Because of this, the ecosystems, the canal, the land, and the black smoke that floats in the air above the waste put the lives of the inhabitants in danger, as well as the soil on which cows and sheep graze. Although it's a matter of a huge financial windfall because the recovered copper is sold to Nigeria and India and transformed into cheap jewelry to be sold in Europe, one shouldn't neglect the toxicity of the shells and the filth of the computers in which the children are immersed all day long. "After having long invaded Asia (India, China, Russia ...), computers, televisions and refrigerators from Europe and the United States have turned up more recently in industrial quantities in the ports of West Africa such as Ghana, Benin or Togo. Officially, these cargoes of used apparatuses are destined to be "reutilized". But sending these electronic products at the end of their usefulness to these regions permits developed countries

especially to forego the effort to recycle or discard them on their land, as such efforts are often judged to be too costly and dangerous for the environment. Of the thousands of PCs that arrive at the Ghanaian port of Tema, “only one or two are recovered for the country’s schools. The rest goes to be discarded,” explains Nyaba Ouedraogo, a French-Burkinabe photographer who investigated locally in January and November of 2008.”¹⁰ This second scandalous case concerning an industrial-environmental catastrophe rests once again on the question of the responsibility of industrialized countries with regard to their numerous chemical and toxic wastes. These countries must deal with their toxic waste themselves just like the Japanese manufacturer Sony and other industries that are willing to assume responsibility by recovering and recycling their used apparatuses. Europe and the United States must respect the Basel Convention, in force since 1992, that forbids the dumping of toxic waste in developing countries. When all is said and done, Ghana should draft laws and policies that restrict the management of toxic industrial waste. With regard to both toxic and non-toxic industrial waste, Africa isn’t a garbage can of waste and toxicity; it is inhabited by men and women who have the right to live with respect for their dignity and their fundamental rights, in an agreeable environment that enhances the quality of the life and health of its populations.¹¹

¹⁰ To know more see <http://www.geo.fr/environnement/actualite-durable/le-ghana-poubelle-pour-les-e-dechets-25740#rpMrf2QpAvxAipYR.99>.

¹¹ Ghana is only one of the bad news on environmental pollution; Koko in Nigeria should not forgotten. See the article of JAMES BROOKE, Special correspondent to the New York Times in 1988, “Waste Dumpers Turning to West Africa” <http://www.nytimes.com/1988/07/17/world/waste-dumpers-turning-to-west-africa.html?pagewanted=all> [accessed 20/06/2016]

3. The Case of The Democratic Republic Of Congo

In this case, it is not a question of toxic waste as is the situation in Abidjan and the Ivory Coast, nor electric and electronic waste as in Accra and Ghana. It is a question of extractive industries that sacrifice local communities. Mining, gas, oil, and forestry companies in the DRC cause much psychological, sanitary, social, and environmental damage. Above and beyond the numerous abuses that these companies have caused to the DRC, in Liberia and the Central African Republic, we have recent evidence from the journal *Phare* of May 12, 2016 that shows the ordeal that the local communities suffer because of the predatory exploitation of mines, gas, oil, and the forests. “For Christophe Kabwita, a member of the local community of Ruashi, located 200 km from the city of Lubumbashi, the flow mixed with acids from the mining activities of Ruashi Mining and Chemaf destroy the arable land and local cultures. The same chemical products pollute the water and nature, thus exposing the inhabitants to sicknesses.”¹² For her part, “Nicole Bila, the representative of the organization RENAD (natural resources and development) has indicated that the local community of the villages of ‘Owo and Asolongo’ in the province of central Kongo, have not been spared the harmful effects of Parengo’s oil extraction. This exploitation by the system of mining and other issues places the local populations in danger and exposes them to complicated illnesses such as blindness, sinusitis and congenital defects.”¹³ It isn’t merely a question of health problems that the inhabitants of extractive zones experience with regard to mining, gas, oil, and forestry extraction. It is also a question of entire villages being exploited and even depopulated, without promoting projects of development there. Outside of social problems, it is a question of the pollution of fresh air, potable water, and soil—in brief, pollution of the environment because

¹² Industries extractives : Les Communautés locales sacrifiées, *Le Phare*, 12 mai 2016..

¹³ *Ibidem*.

mining, gas, oil, and forestry extraction happens mostly in the open. And when it rains, the rainwater provokes floods that cause much damage: destruction of houses, agricultural fields, agricultural service roads, disruption of the ecosystem... And however, from the perspective of sustainable development, these mining, gas, oil, and forestry industries are sensible to invest in programs and projects of development that aim to rehabilitate and sustain the local communities. These multinational companies must respect the ethics of the health of the population by investing much more in projects that give life and health to their employees and to the inhabitants of the villages where the extraction is taking place. They should never ignore that they must take part in taking on consistent social programs, creating schools, hospitals, and constructing agricultural service roads, without neglecting the economic objectives that are, for them, to earn profits. In a word, if multinational companies want to act as public-spirited enterprises, they must also invest in the environment by adopting modern mining, gas, oil, and forestry methods of extraction with the aim of protecting the life and health of those local communities whose wealth they exploit. Despite the reality of the corruption and illegitimacy of certain African regimes, Africa is a continent that attracts foreign investors. They pour into the continent not to work in transparency and to promote eco-democracy but rather to pursue the predation and the pillage of the continent's wealth. The multinational companies do not only work in Africa to maintain the status quo, they also encourage corruption, injustice and violence in the division of the continent's riches. The African dictators cling to power, creating empires of corruption, sowing terror in their own countries on account of the multinational companies that support them. "Offshore companies using traditional bribes, going through the participatory contacts of shell companies in the affiliates of large foreign groups (in Angola, Congo Brazzaville, Nigeria, and the DRC), have multiple areas of agreement with the powers that be. With always the same objective: to guarantee a level of remuneration of the capital invested that remains, on the African

continent, higher than elsewhere in the world (...)”¹⁴ Many multinational companies support autocratic governments to avoid paying taxes, to avoid investing in social programs and to avoid observing the commercial and customs policies of the countries in which they exercise their activities of predation and pillage. Benoit Orval continues, by affirming that “more than 47 million dollars leave the countries of Sub-Saharan Africa every year to remunerate the capital invested. Such financial stakes, like the complexity and opacity of assembly or the diversity of the channels of corruption, weigh heavily on our capacities to act. Even so, when citizens or journalists disclose these deals, they participate in delegitimizing despotic regimes and contribute, modestly but a bit more each time, to drying up the networks of predation of which these latter have imperative need to maintain themselves in power. The real convergences are here to build between African democratic movements and the civil societies of the multinationals’ countries of origin. The fights against corruption and tax havens or for multinationals’ financial transparency and the struggles for democracy are finally, in each country and on a global scale, nothing other than different facets of the one same global struggle for liberty and social justice.”¹⁵

B. African Governments In View Of Their Political Responsibility

The African heads of state and their governments must involve themselves more deeply in the fight against global warming. This responsibility does not belong solely to the nations and governments of rich countries. African heads of state and their governments can embark on the path of lasting development for their own countries, initiate programs to reduce greenhouse gas

¹⁴ ORVAL B., Afrique: regimes autoritaires et un investissement sur, *Revue Projet*, March 23, 2016.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

emissions, and adopt novel solutions in the fight against global warming.

Concerning the lasting development of the countries the African heads of state govern, the most fundamental aspect of their political and ethical involvement consists, first of all and fundamentally, in breaking the abuse of unfair contracts¹⁶ by working in transparency and good governance. African, Asian, and Western capitalist multinationals consolidate and promote an old economics of predation and pillage of Africa that does not permit African countries to embark on the path of lasting development. They open a path of corruption and many African heads of state fall into this trap. Because of this, some cling to power to continue to support the pillage of their own countries. Transparent contracts with capitalist multinational companies would allow African heads of state to embark on the path of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. In a collaboration of transparency and confidence, each African country would have a code of ethics to respect and to enforce in mining, gas, oil, and forestry extraction. From this perspective, the ethical code concerning the exploitation of the wealth of each country would define the clauses of the contract, the conditions to be respected in the realization of the contract and the objective to aim for in such extraction, that is to say equitable economic benefits for each multinational company and each government. It is a question of a win-win situation for commercial transactions. In extracting the mining, gas, oil, and forestry wealth, the developers must take into account the security of the people, the health of the population and the social benefits that the populations can take from the extraction of their wealth and finally, respect for the environment. In this sense, one would pull out of the traditional open-air extraction that endangers the ecosystem and the life and health of the population in order to adopt modern methods of mining, gas, oil, and forestry extraction. Each African country

¹⁶ Cf. RAMAZANI BISHWENDE A., *L'Afrique dans la mondialisation neoliberale*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 2014, 258p.

would be able to create teams charged with participating in the process of conflict resolution in the domain of extraction, to inquire into complaints and allegations of abuse and to impose fines on multinational companies that do not respect the norms of the Social Responsibility of Companies (Responsabilite Sociale des Entreprises or RSE). The local populations would have to take part in the negotiations on the RSE.

African countries can also commit, as some are already beginning to do, to initiating programs to fight against erosion—programs of reforestation, afforestation, and refertilization of the soil with a view toward lowering global warming. Different strategies of fighting global warming would not limit themselves solely to mining, gas, oil, and forestry industries; they would have to be expanded to all sectors of economic life such as manufacturing, agriculture, reforestation...from the perspective of diversifying local economies. All these programs require big money. It is there that the big rich nations would come to the aid of poor countries that do not contribute very much to planetary pollution but who also ought to engage in the fight against global warming. Countries such as the United States, the countries of Europe, Canada, Japan and China as well as other industrialized countries that pollute more than the others, would have to intervene with a big envelope to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to support the efforts of certain poor countries. Often in this domain of intervention and expansion of programs globally, the promises are more numerous and deceptive than the concrete realizations.

Ultimately, African countries would be able to commit to finding innovative new solutions to better lower greenhouse gas emissions. In the fight against global warming, abandoning nuclear energy to reinforce alternative forms of energy production should be encouraged. It is that which creates the jobs of tomorrow. The industry for renewable energy “must be understood to be a transversal mission for all future production—the entire system of industrial production must manage its resources better and become

more ecological.”¹⁷ This field is still new, it needs to be supported by the continual education of its employees and all citizens of each country so that it becomes more operational and relevant to the return to employment and the demand for lasting development.

C. Self-Governance In The Face Of Global Warming

Global warming is not only a matter for the African governments and heads of state, it is a matter for all of us. Every citizen across the globe must be responsible for global warming, and must take action to facilitate its reduction. The reduction of greenhouse gas emissions is a responsibility that is incumbent upon all the world's citizens. And if each person took action to lower global warming, the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions would be felt enormously. And it would have positive consequences for the climate. Self-governance would be managed from the perspective of lasting development by participating in diverse programs set up by each nation and initiating innovative solutions to reduce global warming.

Citizens in each African country can create private companies that must respect ethical guidelines. The Social Responsibility of Companies (Responsabilite Sociale des Entreprises or RSE) would not be imposed only on foreign, African, Asian, and Western countries; it would also apply to the African state and especially to private local companies. Such companies must also work transparently and with good governance while pursuing profits. They would also participate in the diversification of the local economy by investing in social programs such as the construction of schools, agricultural service roads, and health centers for the good, the education, and the health of the local populations. Such

¹⁷ MIKFELD B., La politique industrielle ecologique: Une demarche strategique pour la social-democratic allemande, *Analyses et Documents Friedrich Ebert Stiftung*, January 2012, p. 2.

private companies cannot work without respecting the environment.

Programs to reduce global warming are numerous in an Africa where people cook with coal and wood, where they do not eat enough meat, where they do not protect the ecosystem, where they do not take the trouble to reforest their grants. Efforts can be arranged to educate them in this way and to train them in programs that can help them, locally, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The government, in coordination with its citizens, must promote the production of electricity in place of cooking with wood or coal. Such training of the citizenry is necessary to protect the ecosystem and the environment. Finally, people can avoid deforestation by working for reforestation and afforestation so that the soil can become firm and the rain can fall to fertilize the ground and provide nourishment for the people...

Innovative solutions would be accessible to every citizen who is interested in investing in renewable and inexhaustible energy, by using flowing water, the wind, the sun, the earth, the biomass...that generates more energy. In Africa, where we have much wind and sun, with renewable energy we would never again lack electricity or potable water for the health of the population. "It is now possible to create usable energy in the form of fuel to transport electricity, industrial heat, and thermal energy to heat water and heat or cool buildings."¹⁸ In the last few years, many countries have begun to replace nuclear energy with renewable energy; among these nations, excepting the West and Japan, we can find several emerging countries like China, India, Brazil that make efforts to follow the process of changing from nuclear to renewable energy...These latter become competitive on the market regarding costs of technology, production and consumption. "It is very encouraging that the technological solutions are there. The true challenge is to change habits, explains M. Pineau. It is necessary to align public policy with a population that is ready, that understands the stakes. It is a bit like undertaking a diet if one suffers from

¹⁸ www.rcan.gc.ca/energie/renouvelable-electricite/7294

obesity. Everyone knows it is better for our health, but it is hard to do. It is the same with energy.”¹⁹

What inspires us, roughly speaking, about the three case studies concerning the Ivory Coast, Ghana, and the DRC? Firstly that humans, nature, the world—in brief, humanity in general (along with Planet Earth) are vulnerable. Humanity will become what humans will make of it. If we want to protect human vulnerability, we will take action to reduce global warming for our lives and happiness on earth. And every reflection on global warming must first and foremost pose vulnerability as the factual state of humanity and the planet on which we live, in the general interest of protecting it. Secondly, vulnerability will not be disassociated from self-governance; it stimulates and encourages responsibility for all so that every citizen in the world contributes to make our planet an oasis of peace and happiness where the living is good for everyone. Third, the three case studies reveal “the heuristic of egoism” in which the world is plunged. A bitter observation transpires in these environmental catastrophes: neither people nor nations work for equal opportunity for all. They do not work to promote distributive justice and do not work to promote an eco-democracy of transparency and good governance. People as well as nations are in service to an enslaving and dehumanizing imperialism by considering others who are not like them as the poor, and people of other races as subhuman who can die without need for worry because what matters is to build capital for oneself, to enrich oneself to the detriment of numberless victims in the various countries of the South as well as the North. Nevertheless, the intellectual and pragmatic fight to follow today would be to pursue the struggle against “the heuristic of egoism” everywhere in the world so that responsibilities can be shared to enable a collective fight against global warming. Otherwise, we will all be swallowed up by the catastrophe that global warming can bring about to humanity. It is a question of a shared responsibility that

¹⁹ ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelles/special/2015/11/energies-renouvelables/

mobilizes, first of all, wealthy people and rich nations to become active as the first line of defence against global warming. They are the ones that use the numerous technological means to pollute the planet. This shared responsibility is also incumbent upon African governments and heads of state to become mobilized by facilitating the elaboration of laws, policies, and ethical codes that regulate global warming. But their actions will bear more fruit if they promote an eco-democracy that acts in transparency and good governance for the security, health, and the lives of their fellow citizens. African heads of state and governments must break with “the heuristic of egoism” that pushes them to work for their own interest and that of their clans. From the perspective of strengthening the ethics of their political behaviour, African heads of state and governments will be able to encourage the shared responsibility of their fellow citizens to take concrete and historic action to reduce global warming. This engages the responsibility of everyone, rich and poor, industrial and non-industrial nations. The fight against global warming must be conceived from a perspective of promoting an eco-democracy that would enable all of humanity to leave behind “the heuristic of egoism” to embrace a holistic solidarity for the good and general interest of all.

Translated from the French by Marie L. Baird, PhD, Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, PA USA

THE ENVIRONMENT, POPULATION, AND THEOLOGY: A PERSPECTIVE FROM CAMEROON

David T. Ngong¹

Abstract

Focusing on deforestation and desertification as among some of the significant environmental problems facing Cameroon, this article argues that, among the many things that need to be done to address these problems, population growth needs to be privileged. Drawing from a Trinitarian theology that sees creation and salvation as the means by which the triune God cares for the world, the essay argues that churches in Cameroon should see themselves as communities called and sent by God to continue this care for creation, which especially includes the care for people as a means to care for the environment. Some of the theological moves that need to be taken for this care for the environment to be properly carried out include the development of a prophetic voice that speaks for destitute indigenous peoples, as representatives of the poor, and a rethinking of the common view that children are a blessing from God.

Introduction

The initial draft of this essay was begun on April 22, 2016, which, quite appropriately, was Earth Day. Scrolling through twitter on this day one could see various messages about how to take care of the earth. Some warned of water shortages, others of the

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destruction of various species, and others yet of the anthropogenesis of global warming and climate change. The Internet has become one of the most prominent sites where people are being sensitized about the importance of taking good care of the environment. Looking at some news sites, I found a two-part article (a third part was later added) written by a columnist of *The New York Times* who was part of a filming project that deals with the hazardous migration of young Africans in search of a better life in Europe. Thomas L. Friedman, *The New York Times* columnist, known for his proclamation a decade ago that *The World Is Flat*, wrote the first part of the articles from Niger and the second part from Senegal. Even though the articles were written from two African countries, they dealt with the same issue—seeking reasons why many young Africans are fleeing their countries under treacherous circumstances in search of greener pastures in Europe.

Friedman found that, among other things, these young people come from countries such as “Senegal, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Chad, Guinea, Cameroon, Mali,” and Niger. Their flight, he wrote, is due to “devastated agriculture, overpopulation and unemployment.”² While there are other historical reasons, such as the decadent neo-colonial governance of these countries, that might account for why many young people feel that they do not have a chance at the good life in their own countries at the current time, Friedman put his finger on three important but interrelated issues that need to be addressed in order to forestall their continuous flight to foreign climes, sometimes under treacherous circumstances. In other words, even though these three issues—

² See “Out of Africa,” *The New York Times*, April 13, 2016. Available at http://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/13/opinion/out-of-africa.html?_r=0; “Out of Africa, Part II,” *The New York Times*, April 20, 2016. Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/20/opinion/out-of-africa-part-ii.html?action=click&contentCollection=opinion&module=NextInCollection®ion=Footer&pgtype=article&version=column&rref=collection%2Fcolumn%2Fthomas-l-friedman>. Also see *The World Is Flat 3.0: A Brief History of the Twenty-first Century*, Further Updated and Expanded (New York: PicadorFarrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007).

devastated agriculture, overpopulation, and unemployment—have deeper tentacles, one may get to these deeper tentacles by beginning to address them as they appear, beginning with devastated agriculture. In this case we see that devastated agriculture is connected to overpopulation which is connected to unemployment. In other words, there is a connection among the environment, population growth, and the process of creating a good life.

While every African country may have some unique circumstances as far as these issues are concerned, these three issues, which are all tied to the environment, have affected them in a similar way—diminishing prospects for flourishing human and other life forms. Concern with the environment, in both the scientific and theological perspectives, is motivated by the quest for creating a balance that will lead to the flourishing of human and other forms of life on earth. The environmental crisis in Africa in general and Cameroon in particular has many incarnations including “deforestation, desertification, declining biodiversity, loss of fertile soils, water pollution, urban air pollution, solid waste management,” and others.³ Some of these contribute to the devastation of agriculture and the unemployment that leads to rural-urban migration, and, subsequently, to intercontinental migration.

The fact that the current environmental crisis has many incarnations notwithstanding, this essay will focus on deforestation and desertification in Cameroon, arguing that these, and others, could be addressed from an interdisciplinary perspective that takes seriously what the scientific disciplines and Christian theology have to say about the environment as part of God’s creation which

³ William T. Markham and Lotsmart Fonjong, *Saving the Environment in Sub-Saharan Africa: Organizational Dynamics and Effectiveness of NGOs in Cameroon* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 1.

God seeks to redeem.⁴ Even though the current environmental crisis in Cameroon and around the world has many causes, focus will be placed on its connection to population growth. Given that the population of Cameroon is currently just under 24 million (2016) and that Cameroon's contribution to environmental destruction may be very minute when seen from a global perspective, one may wonder why population growth has to be seen as central to dealing with the environmental situation in the country. However, it is important to focus on population because it is now accepted that our environmental crisis is anthropogenic. This is even more so given that increase in human population leads to increase in the resources needed to sustain them. These resources often come from the environment in the form of food, energy, and others. This increase in demand for the resources to take care of the population often weighs negatively on the environment.⁵ More specifically, population growth is one of the most significant causes of deforestation. As William Sunderlin and Jacques Pokam have noted "population growth and shifting cultivation are generally viewed, respectively, as the main cause and agent of deforestation in Central Africa in general and in Cameroon in particular."⁶ Given

⁴ For the use of an interdisciplinary approach in addressing environmental issues in Cameroon, but which does not dwell on Christian theology, see Markham and Fonjong, *Saving the Environment in Sub-Saharan Africa*.

⁵ Nancy Morvillo, *Science and Religion: Understanding the Issues* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 317. It is however important to note that the region of the world with the lowest population growth, the West, has placed the greatest pressure on the world's resources through industrialization and rapacious consumption. Given that developing countries often aim to become like the West, the pressure on the world's resources is getting even worse. See Nathan Keyfitz, "Consumption and Population," in *Ethics of Consumption: The Good Life, Justice and Global Stewardship*, David A. Krocker and Toby Linden, eds. (Lanham, Maryland: Rowan and Littlefield Publisher, 1998), 476-500.

⁶ William D. Sunderlin and Jacques Pokam, "Economic Crisis and Forest Cover Change in Cameroon: The Roles of Migration, Crop Diversification, and Gender Division of Labor," *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 50 no. 3 (April 2002): 582. Other factors that lead to deforestation, they note, are

that world population has recently been growing exponentially, it is important for Christians and people everywhere, including places with low population (growth), to begin considering its effects on the environment. Given that we are living in an interconnected world that has especially been flattened by the effects of climate change, the environmental crisis has to be approached both locally and globally. The Cameroonian philosopher, Godfrey Tangwa, has noted that in our global and globalizing world “the dangers facing the world as a whole, even if emanating largely from only a small part of it, can best be tackled only from a global perspective.”⁷ Perhaps one may hasten to add that such dangers may also be addressed from a local perspective. Focusing on population growth and the current environmental crisis in Cameroon is a local move that may have a global impact.

The rest of this article will proceed thus: first, the current environmental situation in Cameroon, with respect to deforestation and desertification, will be given, showing some of the historical changes that have occurred as the population has increased. Second, some suggestions as to what needs to be done to address the declining environmental situation will be given. Finally, it will be argued that the church in Cameroon has a significant role to play in bringing about this change and doing this needs to be undergirded by a robust Trinitarian theology that is missiological in nature, connecting care of nature and care of people.

logging and the construction of transformation infrastructure. For more on the relationship between population and environmental degradation, see Cornelius Mbifung Lambi and Emmanuel Ndenecho Neba, *Ecology and Natural Resource Development in the Western Highlands of Cameroon: Issues in Natural Resources Management* (Cameroon: Laanga RPCIG, 2009).

⁷ Godfrey B. Tangwa, “Some African Reflections on Biomedical and Environmental Ethics,” in *A Companion to African Philosophy*, Kwasi Wiredu, ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 387.

Environmental Issues in Cameroon: Deforestation and Desertification

Current environmental concerns in Cameroon are similar to those in most places around the world. Among the most pressing, however, are deforestation and desertification and their attendant loss of biodiversity, diminished agricultural production and reduced water supply. Cameroon's contribution to global warming, like that of most Third World countries, is however minimal.

Cameroon, a small central African country of about 24 million people, has a total area of about 475,000 square kilometres, with over 41% of this taken up by the forest region, which is in the southern part of the country.⁸ Cameroon's rainforests are among the richest, in terms of biodiversity, in Africa and the world. As Samuel Ndobe and Klaus Mantzel put it, "Cameroon's forests probably support the richest flora and fauna in continental tropical Africa, with high levels of endemism, making it one of the world's biodiversity hotspots; it ranks fifth in Africa for biodiversity and the country is home to nearly 8,000 species of plants, 250 mammals, 542 fish, 848 birds, 330 reptiles, and 200 amphibians."⁹ Deforestation in Cameroon therefore does not only carry the threat of soil erosion and depletion of water resources but also of the loss of much of the diverse flora and fauna of the region. It is the recognition that protecting this diverse flora and fauna is important not only to Cameroon but the rest of the world that some environmental organizations have teamed up with the government of Cameroon to designate parts of the forest in the country as national parks and forest reserves. These protected forest zones are

⁸ For more on this, see the section on Cameroon in the CIA's The World Factbook available at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/cm.html>.

⁹ Samuel Nnah Ndobe and Klaus Mantzel, Deforestation, REDD and Takamanda National Park in Cameroon – A Case Study," May 2014, available at Forest Peoples Programme, <http://www.forestpeoples.org/topics/un-redd/publication/2014/deforestation-redd-and-takamanda-national-park-cameroon-case-study>.

however feeling the pressure not only of the local populations, whose livelihoods are being threatened, but also of major international corporations that look to cultivate cash crops such as palm oil and rubber.¹⁰ In order to prevent indigenous peoples from carving out spaces in the forest to cultivate food crops or hunt animals that are sometimes listed as endangered species, these people are often relocated to places where they are forced to seek alternative forms of livelihood. While some of those thus relocated sometimes manage to find alternative ways to make a decent living, others do not.¹¹

Even though the government attempts to conserve the forests in this way, this has not slowed down deforestation in the country because subsistence farmers continue to slash and burn the forest for the cultivation of crops. A recent study has shown that there was an increase in deforestation in some regions in Cameroon from 1986 when Cameroon entered a period of economic depression that saw many people migrating from towns and cities back to rural areas. The concentration of people in the rural areas led to

¹⁰ For more about how local populations or indigenous people interact with the forest in many of the protected zones in Cameroon, see the various papers on Cameroon at Forest People's Programme:

<http://www.forestpeoples.org/location/africa/cameroon>. For the "capitalist economy" as a central driver of the current environmental crisis around the world, see Natasha Lennard and Adrian Parr, "Our Crime Against the Planet," *The New York Times*, 18 May 2016, available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/18/opinion/our-crime-against-the-planet-and-ourselves.html?action=click&pgtype=Homepage&version=Moth-Visible&moduleDetail=inside-nyt-region-2&module=inside-nyt-region®ion=inside-nyt-region&WT.nav=inside-nyt-region&_r=0

¹¹ For examples from two forest national parks in Cameroon, the Korup National Park and Campo Ma'an National Park, see R. E. Brummet et al., "Women's Traditional Fishery and Alternative Aquatic Resource Livelihood Strategies in the Southern Cameroon Rainforest," *Fisheries Management and Ecology* 17 (2010): 221-230; Kai Schmidt-Soltau, "The Costs of Rainforest Conservation: Local Responses Towards Integrated Conservation and Development Projects in Cameroon," *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 22 no. 1 (2004): 93-117.

deforestation because many more people were in need of land for cultivation.¹²

The clearing of the forest for cultivation of crops has not spared even some of the sacred groves of many traditional societies in the grassland region of Cameroon. These sacred groves are often located at the *fon's* (chief's) palace and it is sometimes used for various forms of sacrifices and as burial places for the children of the palace. With the increasing population of the palaces, however, these sacred groves are being chopped down to build homes and plant crops.¹³ For example, the sacred grove of the Vengo people of Cameroon, called *fatcha*, has increasingly diminished due to such activities. There used to be running water in this grove but over time the water has dried up and the area is now little more than a marsh. It has been determined that deforestation occurred in Cameroon at a rate of between 0.8 to 1% between 1990 and 2005, although some think that this rate might be decreasing.¹⁴

Apart from the devastation wrought on forests by small farmers, the government has also leased land to multinational companies for logging and cultivation of palm oil and rubber. Sometimes conservationists attempt to buy the land the government is selling in order to forestall its destruction but they are not able to do so.¹⁵ Forest areas have recently been chopped down by transnational corporations to plant cash crops such as palm trees (for palm oil) and rubber for the export market. Areas around the Korup National Park in southwestern Cameroon, which is a 1200 square kilometre government protected forest zone, and the Campo

¹² Sunderlin and Pokam, "Economic Crisis and Forest Cover Change in Cameroon."

¹³ For more on this, see E. S.D. Fomin, "Royal Residences and Sacred Forests in Western Cameroon: The Intersection of Spiritual and Secular Authority," *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature, and Culture*, 2 no. 3 (2008): 391-407.

¹⁴ AfricaEIN, "Cameroon: Deforestation."

¹⁵ See "The Price of Conservation: The Unkindest Cut," *The Economist*. February 14, 2008. Available online at <http://www.economist.com/node/10688618>.

Ma'an rainforest in the southeast of the country, are constantly under threat from these corporations. Recently, the American investor Heracles Farms has been given a 99-year lease of (forest) land close to the Korup National Park, raising the ire of environmentalists around the world.¹⁶ The cultivation of palm trees and rubber has been going on not only around the Korup National Park but also around the Campo Ma'an National Park where satellite images show how the forest has been depleted from 1973 to 2001. While in 1973 one could see that the area was still dark green, by 2001 the dark green had become light green through the cultivation of palm trees and rubber.¹⁷ The cutting down of forests to plant palm trees and rubber is deforestation because it destroys the pristine flora and fauna of forests that have been around for thousands of years. The natural habitats of some animals are lost, exposing them to extinction, and some of the plants disappear, never to be recovered. Even though palm trees and rubber may serve to reduce carbon emission, they are not forests. They are regularly cleared to keep them clean and so are not replacements for the forests that have been destroyed. Even more, many of the people who suffer loss of livelihood when these new corporations come in hardly find gainful employment at the companies.

In addition to deforestation, there is the frightening advance of the Sahara Desert through desertification in northern Cameroon. The aridity of the northern region of Cameroon is made worse by the gradual disappearance of Lake Chad, a lake that has been the source of livelihood for many in the Lake Chad Basin region, including Cameroon. It is now common to hear of food shortages in

¹⁶ Rhett Butler and Jeremy Hance, "A Huge Oil Palm Plantation Puts African Rainforest at Risk," Yale 360 (12 September 2011), available at http://e360.yale.edu/feature/huge_oil_palm_plantation_puts_africa_rainforest_at_risk/2441/; Earth Watching, "Cameroon Rainforest Deforestation," available at <https://earth.esa.int/web/earth-watching/historical-views/content/-/article/cameroon-rainforest-deforestation>.

¹⁷ AfricaEIN, "Cameroon: Deforestation," available at <http://www.africaein.net/CM/en/issues/view/51>.

the northern region of Cameroon where this desertification is occurring.¹⁸ Satellite photos show how the lake reduced from 1963 when it covered an area stretching from Niger and Nigeria into Chad, Cameroon, and Central African Republic, to 2013 when it is only a shadow of its former self, confined to a small area in Cameroon and Chad. It is reported that this drastic diminishment of the lake is due to anthropogenetic activities around the area and effects of global warming.¹⁹

Deforestation and desertification have diminished the agricultural potential of many rural areas thus forcing many, especially young people, to flee to cities where they hope to find means of livelihood. This has increased the population density of many cities in Cameroon, leading many to live in unsanitary and even geographically dangerous zones in the cities. In the city of Bamenda, capital of the North West Region of Cameroon, for example, many, especially the poor, live on hillsides, which could easily suffer from landslides, and areas that are easily flooded.²⁰ The inadequate method of waste disposal sometimes leads to accumulation of waste in street corners, creating unsanitary living conditions. Living conditions of this nature, coupled with the fact that many young people are unable to find jobs in the urban centre due to the fact that Cameroon is still to emerge from an economic crisis that began in the middle of the 1980s, has led many young people to flee the country, some in the situations we find at the beginning of this essay. How is such a situation to be addressed?

¹⁸ World Food Program, "Cameroon," available at: <https://www.wfp.org/countries/Cameroon/Overview>. Also see Divine Ntaryike, "Famine Threatens 400,000 in Northern Cameroon," Cameroon Postline, 20 February 2012. Available at: <http://www.cameroonpostline.com/famine-threatens-400000-in-northern-cameroon/>.

¹⁹ AfricaEIN, "Cameroon: Desertification," available at <http://www.africaein.net/CM/en/issues/view/53>.

²⁰ See Sunday Shende Kometa and Ndi Roland Akoh, "The Hydro-geomorphological Implications of Urbanization in Bamenda, Cameroon," *Journal of Sustainable Development* 5 no. 6 (2012): 64-73.

Some Responses and Suggestions

Addressing the current environmental situation is urgent not only for the people of Cameroon but for people all over the world. Studies have shown that the halting of deforestation and desertification in Cameroon especially benefits developed and some developing countries that play significant roles in atmospheric pollution.²¹ The continued existence of these forests sanitizes the air people breathe around the world. That is one of the reasons Western environmental organizations have taken significant interest in protecting these forests.

It has been suggested that the current environmental crisis calls for the prophetic voices of all religious people to be raised. Speaking about the urgency of addressing the issue, the past president of the American Academy of Religion, Laurie Zoloth, in her strongly worded 2014 Presidential Address, urged that the current environmental crisis ought to interrupt our current way of life.

We must be interrupted; we must stop. To make the future possible, we need to stop what we are doing, what we are making, what we are consuming, what we think we need, what makes us comfortable. We need to interrupt our work—even our good work—to attend to the urgency of this question.²²

Writing from the American context, Zoloth places the onus of what should be done on the pattern of making and consuming, a pattern that has been held responsible for significantly contributing to climate change. This is another way of saying that the root of the environmental crisis can be located in the capitalist economy. The

²¹ Schmidt-Soltan, "The Costs of Rainforest Conservation."

²² Laurie Zoloth, "2014 AAR Presidential Address: Interrupting Your Life: And Ethics of the Coming Storm," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 84 no. 1 (March 2016): 16. Italics in original.

plundering of the environment orchestrated by the capitalist economy has been described as a crime against humanity.²³ This crime is especially committed by the rich against the poor and the present against the future. This is because the rich nations of the world are contributing more to climate change but the effect of this is being felt all over the world. The environmental crime is being committed against future generations because not to address the issue now is to put at risk the lives of those who come after us—they would inherit an increasingly unsafe planet. Stopping and taking stock and acting to reverse the present situation will be not only taking care of the needs of all in the world, especially the need of the world's poor, but also about taking care of the present and future generations. Not to do anything is to demonstrate our profound lack of concern. We cannot afford to show lack of concern on this issue; rather we need to treat the environmental crisis with the urgency and immediacy it requires, understanding what we are, as Edward Antonio puts it, living in a “kairotic moment marked by an extreme crisis.”²⁴

It is perhaps for this reason that the government of Cameroon has created many forest national parks and forest reserves, as we saw above, and has been part of various conventions whose goal is to curb climate change. As a member of these conventions, the government of Cameroon is said to have been putting some measures in place that are aimed at ameliorating environmental degradation and its effects. One of this is the designation of rainforests as protected areas. Others include using efficient means of agriculture, focusing on renewable energy, and lowering emission through efficient means of transportation. Whether or not these are properly carried out and whether or not they would have the desired effect of what the government of Cameroon has dubbed

²³ Lennard and Parr, “Our Crime Against the Planet.”

²⁴ Edward P. Antonio, “Religion and the Environment,” in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to African Religions*, Elias KifonBongmba, ed. (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 141.

its “Green Revolution” is still to be seen.²⁵ Given that the government has been colluding with foreign companies in the deforestation of the country, one would be wise to take what the government says it is doing with a pinch of salt. It is however important to note that whatever is to be done needs to be done in a context of what has been described as “a fine balancing act,” balancing the fact that the country is still far underdeveloped with the fact that any development needs to be carried out in an environmentally sustainable way.²⁶ While there is considerable debate about what constitutes development and how it should be carried out, it is important to note that those young people who are fleeing from a less flourishing life to places where they believe they may experience a better life, are already indicating what they believe development is. Their situation must constantly be before us as we debate the question of development and whether or not it should be African or Western. It is however important for us to note that even though Cameroon places a globally insignificant strain on the degradation of the environment, the immediate impact of environmental degradation on the lives of Cameroonians is quite significant and much needs to be done to address the issue urgently.

Some studies have suggested that indigenous people who live in some of the forests that have been designated as national parks manage the forest better than the environmental organizations that engineer their removal from these forests. Because they see their well-being as intimately tied to the well-being of the forests, they tend to take better care of it than when the government and environmental organizations swoop in, remove them, and place the area under surveillance.²⁷ More studies need to be done to see if this finding may be confirmed. If it is confirmed, it may lead to cheaper means of managing these forests that would not entail

²⁵ Dounia Mohamed, “A Fine Balancing Act,” *New African* (December 2015), 17.

²⁶ Mohamed, “A Fine Balancing Act,” 16-19.

²⁷ Schmidt-Soltau, “The Costs of Rainforest Conservation.”

sending in forest rangers and removing people from their ancestral lands. This method recognizes the rights of indigenous peoples and takes care of the forests at the same time.

The environmental situation and the promotion of human flourishing in Cameroon, however, need to be engaged not only by the government but also by the church. The church in Cameroon continues to play significant roles in environment protection through education, tree planting, and organic farming, among others. Some churches in Cameroon have included environmental education not only in the academic programs of church-related schools but also in individual congregations. In 2009, for example, the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon initiated a program to plant 100,000 trees by 2012. Organic farming for sustainable food production is being encouraged in some segment of the Baptist Church in Cameroon, while small Christian communities related to the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon have supported environmental education and the need to plant trees.²⁸

Despite the commendable work the churches are currently doing, much is still left to be done. For example, slashing and burning of forests as farming and hunting techniques continue unabated and the felling of trees for use as fuel continue to wreak havoc on the environment.²⁹ Even more, the churches in Cameroon have hardly been seen as advocates for indigenous peoples who are often being uprooted from their ancestral lands and hardly given

²⁸ For the work of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon, see “African Faith Commitments for a Living Planet: Presbyterian Church in Cameroon Long-term Plan on the Environment,” available at

<http://www.arcworld.org/downloads/Cameroon-PCC-summary-Sept2012.pdf>.

For the contribution of the Cameroon Baptist Convention, see “Project of Farmer Tantoh,” available at SYFA-USA: <http://www.syfa-usa.org/projects/completed-projects/>. For the contribution of the the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon, see Nkwawir Jude Fanwong, “Small Christian Communities and Development in Cameroon,” Master’s Thesis, Norwegian School of Theology (Spring 2015), 71-73.

²⁹ Fanwong, “Small Christian Communities and Development in Cameroon,” 72.

enough resources to make ends meet in their new settlements. The churches in Cameroon have therefore often been silent when it comes to environmental justice as the poor continue to be the ones who experience much immediate suffering in many of the attempts at slowing down deforestation and desertification. In order to address this situation, environmental protection needs to be central to the theology of the church. As has been suggested by Ernst Conradie, for this to happen, environmental education has to be central to theological education, especially in theological and Bible schools where ministers of churches are often trained.³⁰ More especially, however, the issue of population growth should be central to this form of environmental education. Environmental theology that sees population growth as critical to environmental protection should be Trinitarian theology that sees care for the environment as intimately linked to care for people. In this context, to care for the environment is to care for human beings and non-human things. Stressing care of human beings should not simply be seen as an anthropocentric way of dealing with the environmental crisis but rather as a prophetic call for human beings to be treated well in a region in the world where they have often not been given fair treatment. This falls within the framework of what the Cameroonian philosopher, Godfrey Tangwa, has called “eco-bio-communitarianism,” where everything in the environment, including human beings, is seen as interdependent.³¹

Towards a Trinitarian Theology of Care for Creation

³⁰ Ernst Conradie, “Sustainability in African Theological Education,” in *Handbook of Theological Education in Africa*, Regnum Studies in Global Christianity, Isabel Apawo Phiri and Dietrich Werner, eds. (Oxford, UK: Regnum Books International), 707-713.

³¹ Tangwa, “Some African Reflections,” 389.

A Trinitarian theology that emphasizes care for creation is missiological in character because it is rooted in the Trinity's self-manifestation in the sending of the Son to redeem the world from decay through the power of the Holy Spirit. It sees Christian salvific discourse as a discourse of care for the creation initiated by a God who does not intend creation to be annihilated but rather to find peace and renewal in divine life.³² Christian theology sees creation as good, purposed to finding and sustaining its being only through constant communion with its triune creator. However, Christian theology also acknowledges that human action is responsible for placing a chasm between God and creation, subjecting creation to decay. That is the meaning of the story of the disobedience of Adam and Eve and its consequences, captured in Genesis 2 and 3. This disobedience, which is the beginning of human sinful actions that harm creation, continues today in various human actions that continue to place human life in the world in danger, especially as seen in our current environmental crisis.

The Christian idea of salvation, which includes the sending of the Son or *Logos* through whom all things were made, connects the idea of creation and salvation, demonstrating the triune God's continuous care for a creation that seems intent on going its own way. The *Logos* undertakes a rescue mission of sorts, to make sure that that which was freely created does not annul its own existence through its own transgressions. The life, death, and resurrection of the Son were the means of proclaiming and manifesting the continuous care which God has for creation, which continues to groan, anticipating its fuller healing in divine life.³³ The action of

³² This Trinitarian theology has benefited from the views of Daniel Miller, "The Doctrine of The Trinity and Christian Environmental Action," *New Blackfriars* 94 no. 1049 (January 2013): 20-31; Svein Rise, "Creation and Redemption in Pannenberg with a View to the Ecological Perspective," *Worldviews* 14 (2010): 216-231.

³³ For more on the centrality of the life, death and resurrection of Christ to ecological theology, see Michael S. Northcott, "Ecology and Christian Ethics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Ethics*, Robin Gill, ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 213-216.

the Father in sending the Son through which the world may be reconciled back to God and the continued sustenance of the world through the power of the Holy Spirit, demonstrate that God does not want God's creation to go to waste. This is perhaps what Pope Francis means when he says in *Laudato Si'* that "The creator does not abandon us; he [*sic*] never forsakes his loving plan or repents of having created us."³⁴ The Pontiff does not only credit us with the ability to do what it takes to avert tipping over the edge of the environmental precipice on which we now stand, but sees our ability to do so as grounded in a God who constantly invites us to fruitful and sustainable relationships. It is in this light that Pope Francis connects care of the environment to issues of poverty and justice, calling for sustainable development that does not damage our "common home" which God has given us. Caring for our common home is therefore a missiological endeavour that derives from the activity of the pursuing God whom we worship. From this perspective, the church is made up of communities called out to participate in divine life through their continuous care of God's creation.

There are of course many ways to care for God's creation but one of the ways to do so in the context of Cameroon is for the church to be advocates of the poor, especially the indigenous peoples who live in forests from which they are constantly being evicted by the government and often abandoned to life of uncertainty and penury in towns about which they know very little. The environmental education of the church should therefore not only be limited to how to plant trees or perform organic farming but should also include how to care for those people whose lives and livelihood are being radically affected through their removal from their ancestral lands.

³⁴ Pope Francis, "Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* of the Holy Father Francis On Care for Our Common Home," (2015), 12. Pdf version available online.

It has been noted that current attempts to protect the environment are often antithetical to a Christian vision of creation, thus exacerbating the penury of those who are already poor.³⁵ The church needs to interrogate current secular visions of environmental protection, be aware of how current attempts to protect the environment often lead to further impoverishment of the poor, and develop prophetic theologies that provide concrete solutions to this issue. The British theologian Michael Northcott has noted how the vision of secular environmental protection is agonistic or conflictual in nature, pitting the saving of flora and fauna at the expense of human beings. “To ‘save’ the values moderns wish to find in nature,” he writes “requires the exclusion of humans from nature.”³⁶ The church should not simply buy into this vision of environmental protection but should rather interrogate it on behalf of the powerless. It is a shame that it is often secular groups that are speaking out on behalf of these people in Cameroon.³⁷

Also, it is important for the church to note that the denuding of the forest and the diminishment of agricultural prospects have in part been brought about by the need for the poor to scratch a living from the earth. The other part, often precipitated by logging and industrial agriculture, is often due to human greed. While the greed of corporations denudes the forests for profit, caring less about the well-being of the people who inhabit such regions, the focus in this essay is rather on the environmental degradation occasioned by the quest for human survival. Most people who live in the rural areas of Cameroon and who contribute in the deforestation and even the desertification process do so not out of the quest for profit but mainly to survive. These are people like my parents who owned few acres of arable land and who slashed and burned down the forest on this land in order to plant food for our nourishment and

³⁵ Northcott, “Ecology and Christian Ethics,” 222.

³⁶ Northcott, 219.

³⁷ For an example of this, see

<http://www.forestpeoples.org/location/africa/cameroon>.

some cash crops to raise money for our education and upkeep. As our family got larger, my parents expanded the area of land they cultivated for food and even cash crops. From this anecdote, one can see that population increase diminished our ability to properly care for the environment because increase in population leads to increase in consumption and increase in consumption leads to environmental degradation.³⁸ While inordinate consumption, especially in the Western world and some Asian countries, has significantly contributed to climate change, the activities of small farmers in Cameroon and elsewhere in Africa also play a part, even though this part is minute.³⁹ When I was growing up in the 1970s the population of the country was about 7 million but today (2016) it has tripled that number. In fact, at the beginning of this millennium, Cameroon was estimated to be “fewer than 13 million inhabitants” but that number has almost doubled in the last fifteen years or so.⁴⁰ This increase in population is putting more pressure on natural resources, resulting in the increasing infertility of the soil, water pollution, deforestation and desertification.

Given the importance of population growth to the well-being of families, it was with much anticipation that I read the apostolic exhortation on the family from pope Francis, hoping that the care of family would be connected to the care of creation, with particular reference to population growth. I was however surprised to see that population is not portrayed in the document as a problem. Rather, focus is placed on places in the world where the population is falling rather than on those where the population is rising. The exhortation instead identified, among the challenges facing the family “the decline in population, due to a mentality against having children . . . promoted by the world politics of

³⁸ See Nathan Keyfitz, “Consumption and Population.”

³⁹ See Allen L. Hammond, “Natural Resource Consumption: North and South,” in *Ethics of Consumption*, 437-475.

⁴⁰ Tangwa, “Some African Reflections on Biomedical and Environmental Ethics,” 389.

reproductive health,” which may lead to “a situation in which the relationship between generations is no longer ensured” and even to possible economic decline and loss of hope.⁴¹

This sentiment correctly identifies the complexity of addressing the question of population growth given that lower population may in fact jeopardize the future of any community. However, it has been noted that population growth is highest in the developing world where there are higher levels of mortality. Higher levels of mortality often lead to higher birth rates spurred by the hope that some of the children will survive. In this context, we are faced with a situation where higher death rates do not lead to a decline in population but rather to its continued replenishment, even though the population growth rate is often small. As the people begin to be more affluent, however, the death rate begins to fall and the population begins to rise.⁴² Many African countries are now at the point where they are beginning to experience affluence and the population is rising, significantly adding to the overall population of the world, placing more strain on available resources. It may well be that a fairer distribution of resources may take care of this rising population. That is however not what is currently happening in the world. The current global trajectory, including the case of Cameroon, is one where the rich are getting richer and the poor are being squeezed. The prospects for the equitable distribution of wealth do not look good, which is why the church has to continuously raise its prophetic voice. Theologically, God is a God of abundance whose economy of grace provides abundantly for everyone.⁴³ In the current political economy, however, that is not what is happening. Even if this were happening, it is not clear

⁴¹ Pope Francis, “Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* of the Holy Father Francis,” (2016), 31-32, pdf version available online.

⁴² For more on this see, Morvillo, *Science and Religion*, 316-319.

⁴³ For more on this, see D. Stephen Long, *Divine Economy: Theology and the Market* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000). Long contrasts God’s economy of plenitude and gift, akin to socialism to the “heresy” that is the “market” economy. Also see Kathryn Tanner, *Economy of Grace* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2005).

that the resources available would continue to effectively sustain a continuously rising population. What happens when population rises without a corresponding increase in, and equitable distribution of, resources is that some people begin to die and this would lead the population to decline.⁴⁴ This would be an awful way to address the population and environmental crisis we are faced with today. That is why the prophetic voice of the church should not only focus on calling for equitable distribution of resources but also on raising the alarm about the adverse effects of a rising population to our environment.

The worthy concern for the future of the human race and economic stability contained in *Amoris Laetitia*, therefore, does not take into account the situation in many African countries, including Cameroon, where the population has been rising significantly even as the resources to care for this rising population appears to be declining. Turning a blind eye to the issue of population growth fits very well within the African traditional model where having kids is often seen as a blessing and thought is hardly adequately given to how the kids are to be cared for. If care of creation is about caring for human beings also, as this essay suggests, and if it is Christian mission to care for creation just as the Triune God does in the process of creation and redemption, it follows that careful thought has to be given to how children are to be cared for rather than just on having them. From this perspective, having kids is not a good in itself, as it is often assumed, but is rather ambiguous—it may turn out well but it may also not turn out well. How the children are to be cared for needs to be ascertained because this is important to whether the act of having a child turns out well or not. Even though infant mortality has begun to decline in many African countries, including Cameroon, it is no secret that Africa continues to have one of the highest rates of infant mortality often due to very

⁴⁴ For more on how population growth may fluctuate, see Morvillo, *Science and Religion*, 317.

preventable diseases. What is the need of having children when their survival and flourishing cannot be ensured?

Speaking of ensuring the survival and flourishing of children may be theologically dicey given that our survival and flourishing is ultimately not attributable to human beings but rather to divine providence. Surely, it may be argued, as the German theologian Christoph Schwobel has done, that the sustaining, preserving, and restoration of creation is divine rather than human work, that we overreach when we imagine that these are in our hands.⁴⁵ However, it is theologically problematic to take human beings out of the equation of caring for creation because humans have a mandate from God to care for creation (Gen. 1:28). While anthropocentrism has been decried in ecological theology, it can hardly be denied that humans have a significant role to play if we are to succeed in reversing some of the environmental destruction we have already wrought. Saying that humans have a vital role to play in this process does not mean that divine providence is not central; rather, it recognizes that God often works in the world through human beings. The *Logos* became human, St. Anselm of Canterbury taught, to do that which only humans had to do but which only God could do. The salvation of the world could not be wrought without the participation of a human being. This applies to how we deal with the environmental situation. While it ultimately depends on God, God has decided not to pursue the process without us, as the incarnation of the *Logos* demonstrates. The eventual renewal of the whole earth and the arrival of the new heaven and the new earth do not appear to need human participation but our current survival on this planet appears to need our participation and cooperation.

Even more, focusing only on divine providence without emphasizing the role of human beings in caring for creation would imply that humans should do nothing about the pressing issue of

⁴⁵ Schwobel is cited in Colin E. Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study* (Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1998), 228.

tackling the current environmental crisis. Because Christians are people called and sent by God to participate in the redemption of creation, all possible and legitimate means of doing this have to be explored and implemented. This involves addressing the issue of population growth and its adverse effects on the environment even though the Roman Catholic Church and many African Christians do not appear open to this possibility. The sensitization that needs to be going on (even through the Internet if possible) should address how to protect the environment by addressing our rapid population growth. In order to effectively do this, one significant issue that has to be addressed in both biblical and African traditional value systems is the view that to have as many children as possible is a blessing from God.

Cameroon's traditional culture, like that of many African countries, is that which sees a successful person or couple as one whose compound is buzzing with people, preferably their children. It is said in Cameroon that wealth is people rather than things. This idea shows the importance that is placed on being in relationship with many people, especially one's children, relatives, and community. Not to have children, as is now well known, is not only to suffer social death but is also to be poor. Thus, emphasis is placed on having children as a form of social and spiritual security. It is social security because it makes one's compound formidable so that anyone thinking of attacking the compound would have to think twice about the matter, given that there will be many people to defend the compound. It is also social security because one who has many children would have many people to support them in times of need, especially when they become old. When they eventually die, the children they had would perform the necessary rites needed to smooth their transition into becoming an ancestor. Even in cases where one does not have children, one's memory is dependent on those who knew them and who are willing to perform the necessary rites to make one an ancestor. Given that all of these are done by people rather than things, one can see why having people, especially children, is critical. To ensure that one would

have as many people around them as possible, one needed to have many children. This is especially so in case some of the children die. It was therefore imperative to have many children to ensure that if some of them die, one would still be left with enough of them who could serve as one's social and spiritual security. These are good reasons for wanting to have many children and they need to be taken extremely seriously.

The African traditional valuation of children is captured succinctly in the biblical world. Psalm 127:3-5 notes that children are indeed a gift from God. "Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the sons of one's youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them. He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate" (4-5, New Revised Standard Version). As a gift of God, children should be seen as desirable; in fact, they should be seen as a blessing. Not to have children or not to want to have them is not to desire this gift and this may put one at odds with the ways of God. *Amoris Laetitia* places the begetting of children within the context of salvation history, thus raising the stakes of the significance of children.⁴⁶ How can salvation history continue if there are no children to link the process? This question is posed by major figures in the history of Israel from Abraham and Sarah to Zechariah and Elizabeth. In fact, the Christian salvation story begins with the birth of a child, Jesus Christ. The centrality of having children in the continuation of the history of salvation can be seen as an important perspective that informs *Amoris Laetitia*. Added to the African traditional view of the perception of people as wealth discussed above, it becomes very difficult to raise the issue of addressing climate change through slowing population growth.

It should however be pointed out that from a Christian theological perspective, our material and spiritual security are in the hands of the triune God who created us rather than in the hands of other creatures. This sentiment is also present in many African traditions where God, not people, is often seen as ultimate. This

⁴⁶ Pope Francis, "Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* of the Holy Father Francis," (2016), 12.

vision may need to be cultivated in order to engage our understanding of the importance of bearing more children and its effects on the environment. Further, the need to bear many children weighs heavily on women who are often seen as little more than their ability to bear children. In fact, making our women to bear more children may demonstrate our lack of care for their bodies.

Even more, what if it is also the case that having children may not be all that worthwhile if the means of sustaining them is not available? What is the use of having children without the resources to take good care of them? What is the use of having children who have a very high probability of dying at a very tender age? What is the use of having children only to see them later drown at sea as they make the desperate attempt to cross into Europe, as is the case with many Cameroonians and other Africans and people from the Middle East? Could it be that sometimes it may be better never to have been born, as Job lamented (Job 3), and a contemporary South African philosopher, David Benata, opined?⁴⁷

These questions may appear nihilistic but in the context of the environmental crisis we face in Cameroon and around the world today they are questions that need to be given serious thought. The point here is not to claim that having children is in itself harmful, as Benata suggests, but rather that it is ambiguous and that we need to make sure that when we have children we should have the resources to take care of them. As we have already seen, having many children weighs on the available resources, making the lives of many miserable. This state of affairs is contrary to the mission of the Trinity who brought creation into being and is intent on redeeming it, in spite of its sometimes wayward ways. Our inability to care for our children is a demonstration of our inability to care for the rest of God's creation just as God expects us to do.

Given that the desire to have many children is often sustained by a context of high mortality, the church should be advocating for

⁴⁷ David Benata, *Better Never to Have Been: The Harm of Coming Into Existence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

ways that may help improve people's livelihood without having deleterious effects on the environment. This would include calling for the establishment of social safety nets that may help take care of people when they are old and the improvement in the technology of food production so that more food may be produced without denuding the already fragile forests. Doing these things would be our own way of fulfilling our calling as people called and sent to proclaim the good news of the redemption of a groaning creation, even as we wait in joyful hope for the establishment of the new heaven and the new earth (Rev. 21).

Conclusion

This essay has focused on deforestation and desertification as among some of the significant environmental problems facing Cameroon today, arguing that among the many things that need to be done to address these problems, population growth needs to be privileged. Drawing from a Trinitarian theology that sees creation and salvation as the means by which the triune God cares for the world, the essay argues that churches in Cameroon should see themselves as communities called and sent by God to continue this care for creation, which especially includes the care for people as a means to care for the environment. Some of the theological moves that need to be taken for this care for the environment to be properly carried out include the development of a prophetic voice that speaks for destitute indigenous peoples as representatives of the poor and a rethinking of the common view that children are a blessing from God. The church ought to be involved in thinking of ways to improve people's lives so as to limit the need to rely on children as security for the future. In fact, relying on children for future security may lead us to forget that our ultimate security is in God who constantly preserves and sustains us.

JUSTICE AND RECONCILIATION IN THE NIGER DELTA OF NIGERIA: EXPLORING INSIGHTS FROM CATHOLIC SOCIAL THOUGHT

Rev. Emmanuel Osigwe¹

Abstract

Available studies on the lingering crisis in the Niger Delta of Nigeria identify environmental pollution, by the multinational oil companies in the region, and their violation of human rights as major causes. These studies have also taken into consideration such solutions that range from increase in derivation policy, establishment of a special ministry for the development of the Niger Delta, military repression and, recently, the amnesty offered to repentant militants from the region. While these approaches have been implemented to a reasonable extent, the expected results remain elusive. None of the approaches seems to have engaged the contributions of the religious bodies in the region for true reconciliation and justice. The article draws insight from the rich depository of the Catholic Social Thought to argue for the integrity of the environment and the human person as the centre of true development. Consequently, economic interest must be secondary to the human well-being and their inalienable rights to a decent habitable environment. It further projects the Niger Delta Catholic Bishops' Forum as an organ that is equipped to fast-track peace and reconciliation in the region. The goodwill of the federal

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government of Nigeria, however, remains indispensable in this regard.

Introduction

In the 1990s, some communities in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria were destroyed because of their agitation against the major oil companies in the region and the Nigerian government. This event led to loss of lives, destruction of properties and displacement of many people. Consequently, some indigenes of the region engaged in violent reactions against the Nigerian state and the multinational oil companies, including the destruction of company facilities and kidnapping of key employees of the companies amongst others. The Nigerian government's response to the violence has consisted of increase in the derivation policy,² establishment of commissions for the development of the region, and military repression of further agitation from the region.

This essay examines the Niger Delta's case and projects a constructive response to the situation from the perspective of Catholic Social Thought. Catholic social thought prioritizes the dignity of the human person and a harmonious relationship with the environment. A just development does not maximize profit at the expense of the environment and its inhabitants. Economic growth must, therefore, rest on justice, which would not sacrifice conditions consistent with human dignity.

² The derivation policy enacted by the government was aimed at giving back to the region some percentage of the revenue derived from the sale of products from that region.

Preliminary Considerations: Justice and Reconciliation in Perspective

The concept of justice presupposes rights, for injustice is a denial of such rights. From this perspective, it has become apropos to speak of human rights and more recently environmental rights. The dual understandings of rights, although not necessarily coterminous, have a close relationship. In contemporary times, the concept of human rights is often anchored on the United Nations *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*³, and for the purpose of this essay, the *African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights*.⁴ One of the purposes of these declarations is to stipulate certain inalienable rights that accrue from the fact of our common humanity.

Justice is not a monolithic concept. Its meaning is often contingent upon its context and usage. John Rawls, an American social justice theorist, in his celebrated twentieth century masterpiece, *A Theory of Justice*, offers a new understanding of justice *as fairness*. Justice for him is “the first virtue of social institution.”⁵ His conception of justice as fairness goes beyond the traditional understanding of justice, which is the firm desire of giving each person her/his due. The principle of efficiency, which seems to undergird Rawls’ idea of fairness, maintains that, “a configuration is efficient whenever it is impossible to change it so as to make some persons (at least one) better off without at the

³ The UN Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948, offers everyone certain inalienable rights. The African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights recognizes the rights of the individual. Article 16, states that every person shall have the right to enjoy the best attainable state of physical and mental health....” These two Declarations serve as basis for rights and justice. See Dokun Onyeshola, *Conflict and Context of Conflict Resolution* (Ile-Ife, Nigeria: Obafemi Awolowo University Press Lt., 2005), 214.

⁴Ibid

⁵ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1971) 3.

same time making other persons (at least one) worse off.”⁶ Thus, justice in this light anticipates equity and equality of everyone. In spite of the criticisms of the Rawlsian position, it offers an alternative to the understanding of justice as the desire to give others their due. To say the least, this traditional understanding of justice remains hoodwinked by the will of the “powerful,” who decides what is just and unjust.

Environmental justice presupposes the right of everyone to a decent environment and meaningful life. A decent environment for human habitation and meaningful living is consistent with the UN declaration and the African Charter concerning rights of persons. Therefore, whatever violates the environment also violates the human lives therein. Environmental justice, in this sense, is “the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies.”⁷ Thus, decisions that affect a people who inhabit specific environments, as a matter of justice, should make the people part of the decision-making process.⁸ Environmental justice in recent times, therefore, “represents the history and continuing struggle of ordinary people for their civil, spatial, and human rights as members of a global ecological community.”⁹

With the violation of rights and other expressions of injustice, reconciliation becomes a necessary path to peace. Reconciliation conveys the idea of healing of memories, making complete or

⁶ Ibid, 67.

⁷ Bullard R.D., *Confronting Environmental Racism: Voices from the Grassroots*. Boston: South End Press, 1993, 203-204, cited in Filomina Steady, *Environmental Justice in the New Millennium* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) 20.

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Filomina Steady, *Environmental Justice in the New Millennium*, 1.

mending of fractured relationships.¹⁰ Such mending or healing of fractured relationships goes beyond interpersonal relationships to the various segments of the society. John Paul Lederach insists on a close connection between relational aspects of reconciliation and peacebuilding.¹¹ True reconciliation must be preceded by a willingness to encounter the other since conflicts often result from exclusiveness and stereotyping. To this extent, “Reconciliation represents a place, the point of encounter where concerns about the past and the future can meet.”¹² This encounter with the past offers opportunity to retell the past as a means of charting the course for a better future. Reconciliation, therefore, consists of truth, justice, mercy and peace.¹³ These components of reconciliation have the potency of rebuilding fractured relationships and restoring peace.

Situating the Niger Delta of Nigeria: Environment and Conflict

The Niger Delta region of Nigeria consists of six states of the Federal Republic of Nigeria,¹⁴ namely Rivers, Bayelsa, and Delta, Cross River, Edo, and Akwa Ibom, that host the bulk of Nigeria’s oil wealth.¹⁵ The region is “the third-largest drainage area of

¹⁰ Matthew Kukah, “The Church, Politics, Reconciliation and the Future of Africa” in *Journal of Inculturation Theology*, Faculty of Theology, Catholic Institute of West Africa (Port Harcourt, Nigeria 2010. Vol. II) 5.

¹¹ John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustaining Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (Washington, D.C: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997) 24.

¹² Ibid, 26.

¹³ Ibid, 29.

¹⁴ I am aware that some authors ascribe three states to the Niger Delta region, namely Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta, and some others add more states, namely, Imo, Abia and Ondo states, however, this essay upholds the definition of the region as discussed in Ike Okonta and Oronta Douglas, *Where Vultures Feast: Shell, Human Rights and Oil* (New York: Verso, 2003) 18.

¹⁵ Ibala Samuel Ibala, “The Ijaw National Congress and Conflict Resolution in the Niger Delta”, in Cyril Obi and Siri Rustad, *Oil and Insurgency*

Africa's rivers.”¹⁶ The Niger Delta also has fertile agricultural land, forests, rivers, creeks, and coastal waters teeming with fish and sundry aquatic creatures. It is strategically located in the gulf of Guinea, which has 5-7 percent of the world's petroleum reserves.¹⁷

The region has been an active centre of Nigerian economic activities from the colonial times. It was the centre of commercial activities in slavery and subsequently in the palm oil,¹⁸ as the business commodity changed. Writing on the Niger Delta, Ike Okonta avers, “The areas’ substantial natural and human resources have always proved an irresistible attraction for slave traders, commodity merchants, colonialists, and plain fortune hunters who subjugate the inhabitants through treachery and force of arms and plunder their resources.”¹⁹ Thus, the current experience of the region is consistent with the history of business activities in the region.

The discovery of crude oil in commercial quantities in the region marked another watershed in its history. Crude oil was first discovered in 1956 in Oloibiri (modern day Bayelsa state), and subsequent oil installations were hoisted in other communities like Bomu, Ebubu, and Afam in Rivers State.²⁰ As a result, “between the mid-1950s and 2005, approximately 5284 oil wells have been

in the Niger Delta: Managing the Complex Politics of Petro. Violence (New York: Zed Books, 2011) 72.

¹⁶ Ike Okonta and Oronoto Douglas, *Where Vultures Feast*, 5.

¹⁷ Charles Ukeje, “Changing the Paradigm of Pacification: Oil and Militarization in Nigeria’s Delta Region” in Cyril Obi and Siri Rustad, ed., *Oil and Insurgency in the Niger Delta: Managing the Complex Politics of Petro-Violence* (New York: Zed Books, 2011) 97. Nigeria exports 40% of her petroleum exports to the US

¹⁸ Ike Okonta and Oronoto Douglas, *Where Vultures Feast*, 6

¹⁹ Ibid,

²⁰ Ibid, 137. See also John Wangbu, ed., *Niger Delta: Rich Region Poor People* Enugu, (Nigeria: Snaap Press Ltd., 2005), 5; Jacob Tawose, Manpower Training and Development at the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation in S. Tomori, ed., *Oil and Gas Sector in the Nigerian Economy* (Lagos: University of Lagos Press, 1991) 35; Ike Okonta and Oronoto Douglas, *Where Vultures Feast*, 22

drilled in more than 1,500 communities in the Niger Delta,”²¹ with the average production of 2.4 million barrels a day.²² This phenomenal leap in oil production gave Nigeria the title of the largest producer of petroleum in Africa and the largest producer of sweet (almost sulphur free) crude oil among OPEC member countries.²³ The major oil companies that later joined Shell Bp in the region are Texaco, Mobil, Tennessee Nigeria Incorporated now called Tenneco, Gulf, Nigeria Agip Oil Company, Safrap now called Elf and Esso West Africa.²⁴ However, Shell Bp has been more involved in oil exploration in the Niger Delta than the above named companies.

Ironically, the Niger Delta has been impoverished by the activities of the oil industry in the region. The constant oil spills destroy fishing activities and farming, which are the basic occupations of the people. Indeed, *Oil Spills Intelligence Report* states that, “Between 1976 and 1991, on the Niger Delta as a whole, official and highly underestimated figures quote 2,976 oil spills, amounting to 2.1 million barrels of crude oil, which averages almost 4 spillages every week.”²⁵ In a recent study, the two oil giants in the region (Shell Bp and ENI), have been blamed for more than 550 oils spills in the Niger Delta in 2014.²⁶ While the oil companies blame local sabotage for the oil spills, *Amnesty International Center for Environment, Human Rights and Development* argues that, “Oil spills from the oil giant’s [Shell]

²¹ Ibid, 137

²² Olukayode Taiwo and Tade Aina, “Environmental Implications of Oil Production and Policy Framework in Nigeria” in S. Tomori, “*Oil and Gas Sector in the Nigerian Economy*” (Lagos: University of Lagos Press, 1991) 49.

²³ John Wangbu, *Niger Delta Rich Region Poor People*, 3

²⁴ J.K Onoh, *The Nigerian Economy*, 22.

²⁵ Oil Spill Intelligence Report, 1992, Custom Oil Spill Data Shell’s Ten Year Spill Record, in John Wangbu, ed., *Niger Delta Rich Region Poor People*, 31.

²⁶ Ruth Krause, “Oil Spills Keep Devastating Niger Delta” in [www.dw.com/en/oil-spills in Niger Delta](http://www.dw.com/en/oil-spills-in-Niger-Delta) (Assessed March 20, 2015).

pipelines are due to poorly maintained pipelines.”²⁷ Thus, lack of responsibility and weak enforcement of environmental laws in the region account for the gross negligence that violates the right to decent environment. Indeed, it has been alleged that Oil corporations take advantage of weak laws and lax enforcement in Nigeria; therefore local communities have little recourse under the nation’s legal system. Consequently, when residents take legal actions for land taken by oil firms, or land rendered useless by oil spill or for any other grievance, oil companies would appeal repeatedly until the plaintiffs run out of money, give up, or die.²⁸

In the testimony of Ken Saro-Wiwa, an environmental activist and leader of a grassroots group,

For 30 years the Niger Delta people have quietly endured military oppression and have watched their environment become polluted by oil. Shell would be slapped with hefty fines if it were to pollute any European or American country one-tenth as much as it did in Nigeria....²⁹

The wealth of oil in the Niger Delta, to say the least, has become a paradox, a curse, a source of poverty, hunger, misery and decimation of cultural life. This is, indeed, a gross injustice against the region. The oil wealth that has been employed to develop other parts of the country can as well be utilized in the development of the region. Justice as fairness, according to Rawls, indicates proportionality or an even development of the parties in the polity. In other words, the situation in other parts of the country must be improved if there is a corresponding improvement of all the

²⁷ The Nation, Nigerian Daily, August 3, 2012.

²⁸ Florence Ogunrin et al., “Corporate Social Responsibility Mode and Crude Oil Business in the Niger Delta” in African Conflict Profile, Journal of the Center for Ethnic and Conflict Studies (University of Port Harcourt. Vol. 1. No. 2 2005) 106.

²⁹ Ken Saro –Wiwa, *Oil Tragedy in Nigeria*, (Port Harcourt, Sunray 1992) 11-13.

regions. Hence, the cry of the Niger Delta is simply for justice in this sense.

Precisely because of the above situation, the 1990s witnessed an unprecedented expression of hostility by the indigenes of the region against the state and the multinational oil companies in the region. This expression of grievances has taken two approaches, namely, the elite who employ dialogue with government and the multinational oil companies, and the unemployed youths who have taken to armed violence and the kidnapping of key employees of the oil companies. Interestingly, the violence of the jobless youths has attracted more attention to the region than the dialogical approach of the elite. Suffice it to say, that the conflict remains unmitigated, as the companies and the state constantly repress legitimate agitation through militarization.

Government Intervention Activities on the Niger Delta

While oil was discovered in 1956, it was not until 1969³⁰ that the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) was established as an agency for monitoring and overseeing the activities of the oil sector. The NNPC is a federal government parastatal charged with the responsibility of formulating and implementing policies as they affect the oil industry in Nigeria. The NNPC not only monitors the activities of other oil companies which are mostly foreign owned, it is also involved in exploration, exploitation and marketing of crude oil.³¹ In other words, the creation of the agency was the first approach to ensuring environmental safety of the oil-producing region. Apparently, the broad spectrum of the agency made it

³⁰ See John Wangbu, ed., *Niger Delta Rich Region Poor People*, 7.

³¹ Jacob Tawose, "Manpower Training and Development at the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation" in S. Tomori, ed., *Oil and Gas Sector in the Nigerian Economy*, 35.

difficult to fulfil its goals and objectives. As a result, there was weak enforcement of environmental regulations that left the area with oil spills and violation of human rights, thus, engendering violent agitations that began in the 1990s, against the oil companies and the state.

The major response of the Nigerian government to the plight of the Niger Delta region consists of: (1) establishment of commissions to execute development projects in the region, (2) increase in the derivation policy, and (3) military repression.

First, the federal government established various commissions and committees to study the socioeconomic and environmental challenges of the Niger Delta. For example, the Justice Alfa Belgore Commission of Inquiry in 1992, the Ministerial Fact-Finding Team in 1994 under the oil minister, Don Etiebet, and the Niger Delta Development Panel headed by Major General Oladayo Popoola in 1999.³² Some of the recommendations of these commissions to the government never saw the light of day.

One would ordinarily consider the attention given to the region as commensurate with its importance to the economic stability of the nation, but the reality remains different. It, then, becomes logical to conceive of these commissions and agencies as reactionary with the intent of dousing further agitation, which could affect oil exploration and the Nigerian economy significantly.

For example, in response to the protests and massacre in Umuechem³³ in 1992, and fearing further agitation, General Ibrahim Babangida, then Nigerian military head of state, in Decree 23 of 1992, established the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC). The OMPADEC was charged with the responsibility of, “rehabilitating and developing the oil-producing areas, tackling ecological problems that have arisen from the exploration of oil minerals, and liaising with the

³² Guardian, Nigerian Dailies, April 28, 1999.

³³ Umuechem is a community in Rivers State, Niger Delta. The protest of the community and the attendant military repression led to the loss of lives and property.

various oil companies on matters of pollution control.”³⁴ Nevertheless, the agency was underfunded and became heavily indebted due to projects it had embarked upon based on approved budgets.³⁵

On charges of corruption and local discontent with the agency, the OMPADEC was supplanted by another agency, the Petroleum (Special) Task Force of General Sani Abacha, in 1994.³⁶ This Special Task Force, headed by General Muhammadu Buhari (retired—the current President of Nigeria), did not achieve much as it was quickly disbanded soon after its creation. Consequently, the non-performance of these agencies continued to exacerbate the Niger Delta challenges.

Soon after his election in 1999, President Olusegun Obasanjo created the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC). The NDDC became the organ to, “formulate and implement programs for the development of the region in the areas of transportation, health, education, industrialization, agriculture, housing, and telecommunications.”³⁷ However, the agency was subjected to the same hiccups that had befallen its predecessors. The malaise of underfunding, revenue misappropriation and corruption continually pose serious challenges to the objectives of the commission.³⁸

The administration of President Musa Yar'Adua took a more serious approach to the Niger Delta crisis. In his inauguration speech on May 29 2007, the President said, “The crisis in the Niger Delta commands our urgent attention...I will use every resource

³⁴ Kayode Soremekun, “Nigeria’s Oil Diplomacy and the management of the Niger Delta Crisis” in Cyril Obi and Siri Rustad, eds., *Oil and Insurgency in the Niger Delta*, 105.

³⁵ Ike Okonta and Oronto Douglas, *Where Vultures Feast*, 33.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 38.

³⁷ Kayode Soremekun, “Nigeria’s Oil Diplomacy and the Management of the Niger Delta Crisis” in Cyril Obi and Siri Rustad, eds., *Oil and Insurgency in the Niger Delta*, 105.

³⁸ Rhuks Ako, “The Struggle for Resource Control and Violence in the Niger Delta” in Cyril Obi and Siri Rustad, *Oil Insurgency in the Niger Delta*, 42.

available to me, with your help, to address this crisis in a spirit of fairness, justice and cooperation.”³⁹ The first act of the president in this regard was the creation of the Ministry of Niger Delta on September 10, 2008. In the words of the President, “The Niger Delta Ministry would co-ordinate our efforts to tackle the challenges of infrastructure development, environmental protection and youth empowerment in the region.”⁴⁰ The continued agitation in the region is a pointer that the president’s proclamation could not be translated into tangible reality.

In June 2009, the president, Musa Yar’Adua, proclaimed amnesty and the disarmament of militants in the Niger Delta region. This amnesty deal with the Niger Delta militants, who willingly and unconditionally submitted their arms, won the approval of many people as a step towards a better future. The amnesty deal came with a package of monthly monetary compensation for repentant militants and a state-sponsored promise of further education, both locally and abroad. The amnesty program has continued through the administration of President Goodluck Jonathan to the current president, Muhammadu Buhari. Probably, a very salutary measure, but I contend that the amnesty is no solution to the crisis in the region. Amnesty to repentant militants does not adequately address the environmental pollution that has rendered many people miserable, with a bleak future. At best, the amnesty treats a symptom, which does not truly affect the disease.

Second, the derivation policy enacted by the government was aimed at giving back some percentage of the revenue from the oil or any products derived from various regions.⁴¹ Although this increase of revenue to the Niger Delta region from 1.5 percent to 3

³⁹Cited in Cyril Obi and Siri Rustad, *Amnesty and Post-Amnesty Peace: Is Window of Opportunity Closing for the Niger Delta?* *In Oil and Insurgency in the Niger Delta*, 200.

⁴⁰Ibid, 203

⁴¹ John Wangbu traces the derivation policy to the 1954 agitation for resource control by the various regions in Nigeria. This agitation warranted the decision of giving back a certain percentage of the revenue derived from sale of products from particular regions. See *Niger Delta: Rich Region Poor People*, 9.

per cent, and subsequently to 13 per cent in 1999,⁴² was meant to alleviate the plights of the region, the implementation not only took a long time, but also the money ultimately ended up in the hands of corrupt politicians, and did not ameliorate the burden of environmental crisis. Thus, it is arguable that corruption has become a major systemic problem of the Niger Delta region and, indeed, the Nigerian society.

Third, military repression against protesting communities has often been utilized by the government as an option to quell agitation in the oil region. This option, however, has always unleashed untold hardship, displacement of families, rape cases, and sometimes the destruction of entire villages for the interests of the government and oil companies. A good example is the destruction of Kaa and Botem communities, in Rivers State, in 1993. The story of Ogoni is not different from that of the other parts of the Niger Delta where the military unleashed terror, rape, torture, death and turned many into refugees.

The fundamental cause of the crisis is the environmental pollution the region is suffering due to the reckless activities of the oil companies, which have impacted negatively on fishing and farming activities. Without a constructive response to this challenge, other solutions to the crisis, at best, remain temporary peace that is purchased at a price, and will not endure the changing circumstances of time. The above discussed government intervention activities, as this article shows, have not addressed the deep pains and socioeconomic challenge of the region, and most importantly the environmental degradation in the region. The challenge makes it imperative to explore the provisions of the rich heritage of Catholic social thought tradition.

⁴² Ike Okonta and Charles Douglas, *Where Vultures Feast*, 41

Insights from Catholic Social Thought

The Catholic Church has been consistent in its teaching about the integrity of the environment and the inalienable rights of the human person. Indeed, the centrality of the human person in every development enjoys an axiomatic position in the Catholic tradition. To this extent, development becomes the growth and flourishing, the cultivation, of the human person. Such human development is both the ultimate purpose and practical foundation of other developmental objectives. Indeed, “Development needs to be concerned with building up and cultivating human persons and communities as wholes.”⁴³

In *Populorum Progressio*, Paul VI, maintains the need for the development in accordance with a progression that will give rise to more human living, which is authentic development. According to him, “It is a development which is for each and all the transition from less human conditions to those which are more human.”⁴⁴ Lack of material necessities of life constitutes the less human living, which the document condemns.

The Second Vatican Council, in its document, *Gaudium et Spes*, emphasizes the status of the human person as the centre of development, “the human person is the source, the center, and the purpose of all economic life.”⁴⁵ Similarly, John XXIII, in *Pacem In Terris*, insists that, “To be human is to have, by nature and not by social arrangement, certain basic rights, rights which are “universal, inviolable and inalienable.”⁴⁶ *Pacem in Terris*, further underscores development as a precondition for peace, for

⁴³ Ibid

⁴⁴ Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio, On the Development of Peoples*, no 20. <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Paul06/p6develo.htm> (Assessed 04/02/13).

⁴⁵ Austin Flannery, ed., *The Documents of Vatican II Documents Gaudium et Spes*, “Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 1975) no 63.

⁴⁶ John XXIII, *Pacem In Terris, Peace on Earth*, no 9 http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_xxiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_11041963_pacem_en.html (Assessed 04.02/13).

“development is the new name for peace.”⁴⁷ In fact, it must be reaffirmed that peace is not only an absence of war, violence, and hostility; it is also a state of reconciliation, human flourishing, and natural beauty. Peace would therefore require justice that is not only talked about, but seen and concretized. Hence, it becomes compelling to establish an intrinsic connection between justice, development and peace.

Inalienable components of sustainable development in this context consist of economic, ecological and social factors. A proper balancing of these variables is very important because an overemphasis of the economic interests without a corresponding interest in the environment and living conditions of the people will certainly lead to crisis, as the Niger Delta case demonstrates. The challenge of justice and peace appears to rest on a proper balancing of these variables. In other words, sustainability, which includes cultural cohesiveness and identity, rests on this proper balancing of the competing interests. This is an issue that, to my mind, has not been well addressed by the Nigerian government.

Central to the crisis in the Niger Delta, it must be restated, is lack of development in the region, a development that is consistent with the significant position of the region to the economic well-being of the country. This lack finds expression in the economic stagnation, environmental destruction and the decimation of social life. David Hollenbach, an American moral theologian reflecting on socio economic situation, has rightly warned:

Serious injustices... are building around the world of human beings, a network of domination, oppression and abuses which stifle freedom and which keep the greater part of humanity from sharing in the building up and enjoyment of a more just and fraternal world....These stifling oppressions constantly give rise to great numbers of “marginal” persons, ill-fed, inhumanly housed, illiterate and deprived of political power as

⁴⁷ Ibid 76

well as of the suitable means of acquiring responsibility and moral dignity.⁴⁸

The situation in the Niger Delta attracted the attention of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria. As shepherds, the bishops, in February 2010, established the Niger Delta Catholic Bishop's Forum (NDCBF), with the mandate of constituting and liaising with other Civil Society Organizations in response to the crisis on the region.⁴⁹ Its first plenary meeting, held June 10-11 2010, in Port Harcourt, was attended by representatives of the oil companies in the region, the government agencies, representatives of the local community and representatives of the Dutch embassy in Nigeria.⁵⁰ This inaugural meeting had far-reaching decisions, particularly on the issue of compensation for water and land pollution due to exploratory activities.⁵¹ The conclusion of the Bishops' memorandum demonstrates a great sign of hope for the future:

As shepherds, we cannot forsake our Sheep. We therefore maintain our common and unequivocal stance against intimidation, violence, sabotage and vandalism, and undertake to teach and lead our people toward a new commitment to the economic transformation of our Region and country. At the same time, we will stand solidly by them in their just struggle for clean, sustainable environments and secure livelihoods.⁵²

The fact that the NDCBF was able to bring the major actors in the Niger Delta conflicts together portends a great sign of hope.

⁴⁸ David Hollenbach, *Justice, Peace, And Human Rights: American Catholic Social Ethics in a Pluralistic Context* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1988) 21.

⁴⁹ Unpublished Niger Delta Catholic Bishops Forum Report to the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria on the Activities of the Forum 2012, 1.

⁵⁰ Ibid

⁵¹ Ibid

⁵² Ibid 2

Similarly, the moral authority of the Bishops of the region, to my mind, presents the forum as capable of mediating peace in the region. An instance of history was the significant role of Archbishop Desmond Tutu in the success of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which owed so much to his moral authority. The bishops of the Niger Delta are very well positioned to play a similar role in the region.

The initiative of the bishops and the aforementioned activities are already pointing toward success in reconciling the various parties. The federal government could reinforce the resolve of the bishops by cooperating with the guidelines and directives of the bishops. Again, the forum's strong advocacy at the publication of the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) Report on Ogoni land in 2011 appears strong and forceful enough as an organ of just peace-making.

And so, the NDCBF addressed the major stakeholders and active players in the conflict thus:

“Government:

- To immediately put in place a mechanism for sustainable supply of potable water to affected communities.
- To initiate a complete restructuring of regulatory agencies such as Ministry of Environment and the Environmental Guidelines and Standards for Petroleum Industry in Nigeria (EGASPIN) framework for effective and accountable service delivery.
- In addition, we urge the Government to commission and publish a comprehensive and systematic survey of environmental degradation across the entire Niger Delta region, and in doing this, we expect that the protection of land, waters and health communities should be paramount.

Shell:

- To apply internationally accepted standards in their operations in the Niger Delta
- Shareholders of Shell should hold the company accountable for its practices. We find it highly regrettable that in 2006, at the Shell AGM in the Hague, Directors of Shell persuaded shareholders to reject the resolution presented by the shareholder group, ECCR (Ecumenical Council for Corporate Responsibility), UK, which called on Shell to improve on its practices with regard to its social and environmental responsibility, as well as consultation and risk analysis.

Civil Society:

- We urge Civil Society and the media to closely monitor and publish the activities of government and multinational oil companies operating in the Niger Delta

Communities:

- We recognize the pains and sufferings that communities have endured over the years, as well as the degradation of the ecosystem. However, in pursuing their legitimate rights, we urge them to refrain from acts of violence and vandalism of oil installations.”⁵³

The Niger Delta Catholic Bishops’ Forum, to my mind, in collaboration with other religious bodies in the region can effectively coordinate peace-making activities from the grassroots. The forum, living up to its expectation could become the voice of the voiceless, and the last hope of the region. Under this condition, meaningful dialogue between the aggrieved parties can commence.

⁵³ Unpublished Statement of the Niger Delta Catholic Bishops’ Forum on the Recent UNEP Report on Ogoniland, Rivers State, August 23, 2011.

The government could achieve an amicable resolution of the conflicts by supporting and encouraging this group.

Above all, the economic development of the region remains paramount. This emphasis clearly echoes the position of the Nigerian Catholic Bishops' Conference in reflecting on the situation of the Niger Delta. Commenting on the Niger Delta, the Bishops' observe, "While there is relative peace and tranquillity at present, we should not be led to think that this is a sustainable peace if systemic injustices are not properly addressed."⁵⁴ These expressed positions clearly express the indispensable role of sustainable economic development for peace.

Conclusion

Resolution of conflicts is a painstaking process that often involves a lot of time, resources and sacrifice. The Niger Delta crisis has lingered for decades and so requires a sincere and constructive response. The unhindered environmental pollution and its attendant challenges to human life call for urgent local and international action. This is precisely an area where the international community can prevail on the multinational oil companies, who prospect for the oil in the region, and the Nigerian government.

Arguably, the Niger Delta has been central to the economic life of Nigeria. It therefore stands to reason that the region deserves a radical economic revamping. This is simply a question of fairness, as John Rawls eloquently demonstrates. In the search for peace, there is no alternative to justice. Justice is the absolute condition for peace. The Niger Delta's enormous contribution to the Nigerian economy already presented in this essay imposes a strong moral obligation on the Nigerian government to embark on a

⁵⁴ Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria, *Growing A New Nigeria: Joint Pastoral Letter on the 50th Anniversary of Nigeria's Political Independence*, Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, Abuja March 13, 2011, 28.

massive development of the region. Justice, therefore, demands an urgent and accelerated transformational agenda for the region as the necessary route to peace. To accelerate the highly needed reconciliation and proper balancing of economic interest, this essay proposes the contribution of the Catholic Social Thought and Niger Delta Catholic Bishops' Forum.

CARE FOR OUR COMMON HOME ECOLOGY AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN ASIA

Peter C. Phan¹

Pope Francis's *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home* is the first encyclical devoted exclusively to the issue of ecology. In its opening paragraphs (nos. 3-6) Francis recalls the teaching of his predecessors John XXIII, Paul VI, and Benedict XVI on the moral obligation to safeguard the environment. However, all of their statements on ecology are *obiter dicta*, and none of the earlier documents of Catholic social teaching offers a sustained treatment of the subject.² In a sense *LS* encapsulates the twin foci of Francis's pontificate, which are implied in his choice of "Francis" as his name. Three days after his election to the papacy on March 13, 2013, he explained the reason for his choice: "Francis was a man of poverty, who loved and protected creation." Protection of the environment and love for the poor are the two basic themes of the encyclical, and they are strictly intertwined since, as the pope insists, it is the poor who suffer the most from ecological destruction: "The deterioration of the environment and of society affects the most vulnerable people on the planet" (no. 21). The encyclical is an urgent clarion call to the whole world to heed the

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² Pope Francis, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*, with Commentary by Sean McDonagh (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2016, henceforth *LS*). Of special note is John Paul II's World Day of Peace Message *Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All Creation* (January, 1, 1990).

cry of the poor and the cry of the devastated Sister Earth that, in Francis's vivid description, "is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth" (no. 21).

It is still too early to tell, but all the signs seem to indicate that *LS* is fated to meet with the same fierce opposition as Pope Paul VI's *Humanae Vitae*, which condemns "artificial contraception." The difference is that this time opposition comes from the opposite side of the ideological spectrum, that is, conservatives, especially in the United States of America, who believe that global warming is a scientific hoax perpetrated by anti-capitalistic ultra-leftists to destroy profitable fossil-fuel industries and to curb the globalization of the Western technocratic paradigm of production and consumption.³ Of course, deniers of climate change in opulent countries of the First World can easily avoid its deleterious effects on their health and environment by having multinational corporations export ecologically polluting industries to Third-World or Majority-World countries, where they can operate cheaply and unencumbered by the legal constraints that are imposed in their own developed countries. In the process, they damage the environment, as *LS* notes, "leaving behind great human and environmental liabilities, such as unemployment, abandoned towns, the depletion of natural reserves, deforestation, the impoverishment of agriculture and local stock breeding, open pits, riven hills, polluted rivers and a handful of social works that are no longer sustainable" (no. 51).

The intent of this essay is not to summarize and evaluate the encyclical as a whole, which is unnecessary, as there is already a good number of studies, both popular and scholarly, that offer a summary and a critical analysis of it.⁴ Rather my task is to read *LS*

³ Prominent among opponents to the encyclical are the leading figures of the U.S. Republican Party, such as veteran climate change deniers James Inhofe and Rick Santorum, and the leaders of fossil-fuel industries such as Arch Coal.

⁴ See, for example, Donal Dorr, *Option for the Poor & for the Earth: From Leo XIII to Pope Francis* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2016); John Fleming & John Ozolins, *Laudato Si': A Critique* (Redland Bay, QLD: Conner Court Publications, 2016); Elizabeth-Anne Stewart, *Preaching & Teaching Laudato*

with Asian eyes, from the Asian perspective, and this I will do by raising three questions. Firstly, which ideas of the encyclical would hold the greatest interest and thus have the greatest relevance for Asians? Secondly, are there any aspects of the teaching of the encyclical that would be enriched by incorporating the teachings of the Asian Catholic Church and insights from the philosophical and religious traditions of Asia? And thirdly, which most urgent remaining ecological issues still need to be addressed?

***Laudato Si'*: An Encyclical For Asia?**

In a broad sense the question of whether the encyclical is directed to the people of Asia should be responded affirmatively since Pope Francis addresses not only Catholics and other Christians but also the whole humanity since “the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all” and since “all of us can cooperate as instruments of God for the care of creation, each according to his or her own culture, experience, involvements and talents” (no. 15). But there is a special sense in which the people of Asia will find *LS* to be of particular relevance for them in light of both its teachings on environmental protection and the ecological situation of their continent.

It is interesting to note that there is in Asia no leading politician or prominent business leader who would deny the reality of climate change and ecological destruction. All it takes for them to dispel any thought of climate change as a scientific and political hoax is to step outside their office into the street in any Asian

Si': *On Care for Our Common Home* (Amazon Digital Services, 2016); Kevin Irwin, *A Commentary on Laudato Si': Examining the Background, Contributions, Implementation, and Future of Pope Francis's Encyclical* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2016); Nellie McLaughlin, *Life's Delicate Balance: Our Common Home and Laudato Si'* (Dublin: Veritas Publications, 2016); Anthony Kelly, *Laudato Si'* (Adelaide, SA: ATF Press, 2016).

metropolis; they would be choked by smoke-filled air, assaulted by acrid smell, contaminated by disease-bearing water, and overwhelmed by burning heat. In calling for environmental protection in Asia Francis is thus preaching to the choir, but the scientific information he provides on global warming (chapter one) is no less useful, his discussion of the “human roots of the ecological crisis” (chapter three) no less enlightening, his message about “integral ecology” (chapter four) no less apposite, and his call for “ecological conversion” and “ecological education and spirituality” (chapter six) no less urgent, given the fact that in all the areas in which human life is adversely affected by ecological degradation Asia (along with Africa) is the most vulnerable continent.

Unfortunately, because of lack of scientific education, many Asians—like most people in the Majority World—are not intellectually equipped to understand *why* climate change and its attendant ecological catastrophes occur. They tend to view natural disasters—floods, typhoons, hurricanes, drought, torrential and prolonged rains, ice storms, heat waves, and other weather-related excessive phenomena—as unavoidable natural cycles, or worse, to accept apocalyptic interpretations of them as God’s punishments for human sins. Thus, they are unable to see, as Pope Francis puts it, “the human roots of the ecological crisis” and that “a certain way of understanding human life and activity has gone awry, to the serious detriment of the world around us” (no. 101). As a consequence, they fail to acknowledge their own responsibility for ecological destruction and take up the task of protecting the environment.

By presenting a scientifically accurate and yet highly accessible explanation of how climate change results from human activities (chapter one) *LS* makes a great contribution—normally not expected of a religious document—to the diffusion of the much-needed understanding of the *causal connection* between the release of greenhouse gases (carbon dioxide, methane, nitrogen oxides and others) into the atmosphere, the depletion of the ozone

layer, global warming, the melting of the polar ice, the rise of the sea level on the one hand and human activities such as the burning of fossil fuel (coal, petroleum and gas), deforestation, the dumping of industrial and nuclear waste and chemical products, and the increasing use of fertilizers, insecticides, fungicides, herbicides and agrotoxins in general. Unless this causal connection between global warming and human activities is clearly understood and acknowledged, communal efforts “to resolve the tragic effects of environmental degradation on the lives of the world’s poorest” (no. 13) in “a new and universal solidarity” (no. 14) would be impossible. For Catholics, especially those who do not possess the requisite scientific knowledge—in fact, a majority of Asian Catholics—to verify for themselves the fact of global warming, especially over against the denial of it by powerful interest groups, the affirmation by the highest teaching authority of the church that “our common home is falling into serious disrepair” (no. 61) serves as a rich and helpful source of information and an incentive for concerted action to promote an “*integral ecology*” (no. 137).

Thanks to Pope Francis’s clarion call “to hear *both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor*” (no. 49), we are now encouraged to pay attention to the catastrophic impact of global warming and climate change on the Asian poor, especially in three areas.

Firstly, loss of safe habitable land! It was recently reported that 35 million people who live in the delta area of Bangladesh would be displaced and lose their livelihood if the global sea levels rise by one meter (3.3 feet).

Secondly, lack of access to fresh water and the pollution of water. While 97.5 percent of Earth’s water is found in its oceans, only three percent is fresh water. During the twentieth century, due to the threefold increase of human population, industrialization, and irrigation of agriculture, water consumption jumped sevenfold, and it is predicted that by 2025, two-thirds of the world’s population will experience water shortages. Sixty percent of the world’s population live in Asia, yet only 36 percent of the world’s fresh water is available to them, and water scarcity drives up its price for

the poor. (It was reported in 2002 that in Pakistan water costs 1.1 percent of the people's daily wage, whereas in the United States, only as little as 0.006 percent.). Furthermore, as Pope Francis points out, "the quality of water available to the poor" is toxic:

Every day, unsafe water results in many deaths and the spread of water-related diseases, including those caused by microorganisms and chemical substances. Dysentery and cholera, linked to inadequate hygiene and water supplies, are a significant cause of suffering and of infant mortality. Underground water sources in many places are threatened by the pollution produced in certain mining, farming and industrial activities, especially in countries lacking adequate regulation or controls. It is not only a question of industrial waste. Detergents and chemical products, commonly used in many places of the world continue to pour into our rivers, lakes and seas (no. 29).

To those living or visiting Asia, sadly the pope's description of water pollution is all too familiar.

Water scarcity has caused conflicts not only in the Middle East over the Tigris-Euphrates River, and Africa over the Nile but it is also the source of potential conflicts in Asia: between Pakistan and India (the Indus River), between India and Bangladesh (the Ganges and the Brahmaputra Rivers), among Thailand, Myanmar and China (the Salween River), and among Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam (the Mekong River). The melting of the glaciers on the Himalayas, which is caused by global warming, will affect the waters of the Ganges, Brahmaputra, Irrawaddy, Mekong, Salween, Yangtze, and Yellow Rivers. It has been said that in international economy and politics water promises to be to the twenty-first century what oil was in the twentieth century. Finally, the pope goes on to note, "the control of water by large multinational businesses may become a major source of conflict in this century" (no. 31). Transnational water has become a highly profitable

commodity and private companies have attempted to capture the “water market.” Needless to say, privatizing water for profit further deprives the Asian poor of their right to safe water.

Thirdly, the loss of biodiversity! According to many scientists, in our time the earth is experiencing the sixth greatest extinction of life since life began 3.8 billion years ago. In 2015 the extinction of species was taking place one thousand times faster than at the end of the Ice Age, and this unprecedented loss of biodiversity is compounded by global warming. *LS* points out that “each year sees the disappearance of thousands of plant and animal species which we will never know, which our children will never see, because they have been lost forever. The great majority become extinct for reasons related to human activities” (no. 33). In Asia, much of the biodiversity found in tropical countries is disappearing at an alarming rate. For example, the number of orangutans, which live only in Indonesia and Malaysia, is facing extinction by illegal logging and the clearance of their habitat for palm oil plantation. Golden-headed langurs and black-crested gibbons are disappearing in north-eastern Vietnam.

Loss of biodiversity occurs not only on land but also in the waters. *LS* notes: “Oceans not only contain the bulk of our planet’s water supply, but also most of the immense variety of living creatures, many of them still unknown to us and threatened for various reasons. What is more, marine life in rivers, lakes, seas and oceans, which feeds a great part of the world’s population, is affected by uncontrolled fishing, leading to a drastic depletion of certain species” (no. 40). *LS* points out that “carbon dioxide increases the acidification of the ocean and compromises the marine food chain” (no. 24). In Asia, in a single year, the Yellow River can dump into the South China Sea 751 tons of heavy metals along with 21,000 tons of oil. In addition to acidification, climate change also contributes to the deoxygenation of sea water. Recent ocean models project that there will be a decline between one and seven percent in the global ocean oxygen in this century, which has a negative impact on fish and other marines organisms.

Loss of biodiversity in the oceans is also caused by fishing with giant deep-sea-bottom trawlers, which is heavily subsidized by governments and which strips the oceans bare. A study by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature in 2012 found that 12 percent of all the marine species in the tropical eastern Pacific Ocean were threatened with extinction. In addition, mining for copper, manganese, nickel, cobalt and rare metals on the floor of the Pacific Ocean at 2.5 miles beneath the surface will also do irreparable damage to marine life. Two marine ecosystems are especially at risk: the coral reefs and the mangrove forests. *LS* notes: “Many of the world’s coral reefs are already barren or in a state of constant decline” (no. 41). Coral reefs, which are comparable to the great forests on dry land, provide shelter and livelihood security for nearly half a billion people across the globe. Like coral reefs, mangrove forests provide food and shelter for fish. Tragically, in the last forty years millions of acres of mangrove areas have been destroyed. In Asia, Thailand has lost 27 percent of its mangrove forests; Malaysia 20 percent; the Philippines 45 percent; and Indonesia 40 percent.

From these brief considerations on the disastrous impact of global warming on Asia, and especially the Asian poor, in three areas, namely, loss of habitable land, access to healthy water, and biodiversity, it is clear that *LS*, though not specifically written for Asia, is highly relevant for Asia. As the encyclical argues, not only has the “environmental, economic, and social ecology” been degraded (nos. 139-142) but also the “cultural ecology” (nos. 143-146) and the “ecology of daily life” (nos. 147-155) have been seriously harmed. These three ecologies constitute what *LS* terms “integral ecology” that must be preserved by means of a worldwide and concerted effort (chapter four). As *LS* points out sombrely, ecological destruction has led to a decline in the quality of human life and the breakdown of society: “The social dimension of global change include effects of technological innovations on employment, social exclusion, an inequitable distribution and consumption of energy and other services, social breakdown,

increased violence and a rise in new forms of social aggression, drug trafficking, growing drug use by young people, and the loss of identity” (no. 46). Furthermore, ecological degradation has also led to “global inequality” between the rich countries of the Global North and the developing and poor countries of the Global South (nos. 48-52). A quick survey of the Asian contemporary social and economic scene will confirm Pope Francis’s succinct litany of the challenges Asia is facing as the result of ecological degradation.

“The Great Sages Of The Past”

In calling for the restoration of the integral ecology Pope Francis appeals not only to the Judeo-Christian biblical tradition with its emphasis on the universe as God’s creation (nos. 76-83), universal communion (nos. 89-92), and the common destination of goods (nos. 93-95), but also to the wisdom of Saint Francis of Assisi as expressed in his celebrated *Canticle of the Creatures* (no. 87), whose opening line serves as the title of the encyclical. Furthermore, introducing a theological novelty, he cites the teaching of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew (nos.7-9) and twenty-one episcopal conferences, including those of the Philippines (no. 41), Japan (no. 85), and the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (no. 116).

It is noteworthy that the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC) is probably the first official church body to be deeply concerned for ecology.⁵ Already in 1988, at the Eleventh

⁵ For a collection of the FABC’s and its various Offices’ documents, see *For All Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences. Documents from 1970 to 1991*, vol.1, ed. Gaudencio Rosales and C. G. Arévalo (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991); *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences. Documents from 1992 to 1996*, vol. 2, ed. Franz-Josef Eilers (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications, 1997); *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences. Documents from 1997 to 2001*, vol. 3, ed. Franz-Josef Eilers (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications,

Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs in Sukabumi, Indonesia, it was stated that "the ecological question or the harmony and balance of the natural environment in relation to the life of man is a fundamental one. The destiny of humankind is inextricably bound up with the way they cultivate the earth and share its resources. Harmony and peace call for respect for the earth. She is the mother of whose dust we are made and to whose womb we shall return. The usurpation of the fruit of the earth by some and the deprivation of others of the same results in the rupture of harmony among peoples."⁶

Among the Institute's many pastoral recommendations, there is one regarding the environment:

Respect for nature and compassion for all living things are ingrained in the Asian religions and cultural traditions. Today in Asia owing to many factors, the natural environment with which man should be in harmony is being wantonly destroyed through deforestation, industrial pollution, depositing of nuclear wastes, etc. Christian life and witness should manifest greater sensitivity to nature and to all sentiments. Hence we recommend that Christians join forces and cooperate with all movements of followers of other religions and secular groups engaged in maintaining balance and harmony in our ecosystem, and protecting nature and its riches from destruction.⁷

2002); *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences. Documents from 2002 to 2006*, vol. 4, ed. Franz-Josef Eilers (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications, 2007); and *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences. Documents from 2007 to 2012*, vol. 5, ed. Vimal Tirimanna (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications, 2013). These volumes will be cited as *For All Peoples of Asia*, followed by their respective years of publication.

⁶ *For All the Peoples of Asia* (1992), 320.

⁷ *For All the Peoples of Asia* (1992), 323.

Concern for the environment recurred as a constant refrain in the FABC's Plenary Assemblies and in the various documents of its offices in the ensuing years. At the Sixth FABC Plenary Assembly on "Christian Discipleship in Asia Today" in 1995, it is stated in the Final Statement:

Ecology is once again brought to our pastoral attention. And urgently so, since we see in the countries of Asia the continuing and unabated destruction of our environment....Life, especially in a third world setting, is sacrificed at the altar of short term economic gains. The Lord, the Giver of Life, calls our discipleship in Asia into a question on the time bomb issue of ecology. Choosing life requires our discipleship to discern and act with other faiths and groups against the forces of ecological destruction.⁸

Note that the FABC's approach to ecology is framed in terms of "harmony" and "wholeness," which are said to be characteristic ideals of Asian peoples: "When we look into our traditional cultures and heritages, we note that they are inspired by a vision of unity. The universe is perceived as an organic whole with the web of relations knitting together each and every part of it. The nature and the human are not viewed as antagonistic to each other, but as chords in a universal symphony."⁹ It is out of this sense of universal harmony and wholeness that concern for ecology is born and nourished. Indeed, there is a fourfold harmony to be achieved: with God, with oneself, with others, and with nature. A disturbance in any one of these four relations brings about disharmony in the other three; conversely, harmony in any one of them strengthens harmony in the other three. Thus, harmonious ecology is rooted in harmonious relation with God, with oneself, and with others. By the same token, there cannot be harmony with God, with oneself,

⁸ *For All the Peoples of Asia* (1997), 11.

⁹ *For All the Peoples of Asia* (1992), 319.

and with others without harmonious ecology. Indeed, the idea of harmony is so central to Asian thought and life that the Theological Advisory Commission (now Office of Theological Concerns) has produced a 70-page document entitled *Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony*, in which ecological degradation figures among the most destructive forces causing disharmony in Asia.¹⁰

Ecology is also discussed at the FABC's Seventh Plenary Assembly in 2000 with the theme "A Renewed Church in Asia: A Mission of Love and Service."¹¹ The Tenth Plenary Assembly in 2012 with the theme "A New Evangelization," notes how the ecological issue was brought to worldwide attention by the monumental disaster in Japan caused by a tsunami on March 11, 2011: "Our Assembly has likewise noted the unabated abuse of creation due to selfish and shortsighted economic gains. Human causes contribute significantly to global warming and climate change, the impact of which affects the poor and the deprived more disastrously. The ecological concern, the care for the integrity of creation, including intergenerational justice and compassion, is fundamental to a spirituality of communion."¹²

As important as these FABC's documents are, they are not cited by *LS*. Instead, the encyclical quotes three other lesser-known texts. The first is a brief statement of the Colloquium on Faith and Science held in Tagaytay, the Philippines by the FABC Office of Education and Student Chaplaincies in 1993 entitled *Love for Creation, An Asian Response to the Ecological Crisis*.¹³ The statement provides a helpful analysis of the ecological problem in its scientific, cultural, political, theological and pastoral dimensions. The second document is the pastoral letter on ecology of the Conference of Catholic Bishops of the Philippines, whose title *What Is Happening to Our Beautiful Land* is echoed in the title

¹⁰ See *For All the Peoples of Asia* (1997), 237-238. The entire document is found on pp. 229-298.

¹¹ See *For All the Peoples of Asia* (2002), 7.

¹² *For All the Peoples of Asia* (2014), 45. .

¹³ The text is available at <http://www.usanews.com/story-archive>.

of *LS*'s first chapter, "What Is Happening to Our Common Home." The letter begins with a graphic list of the ecological damages that have been done to the forests, seas, and land of the Philippines and ends with a recommendation of activities that can and must be undertaken by individuals, churches, and the government "to respect and defend life." The third document is a rather lengthy letter of the Catholic Bishops of Japan titled *Reverence for Life: A Message for the Twenty-First Century from the Catholic Bishops of Japan* (January 1, 2001). Chapter 3, titled "Life and Death," discusses eight issues, one of which being the environment. It recalls Rachel Carson's prophetic voice warning the world in 1962 about the "silent spring" and ends with the following beautiful words, which *LS* quotes (no. 85): "God cares even for the flowers of the field, dressing each with beauty and loving it. To sense each creature singing the hymn of its existence is to live joyfully in God's love and hope."

So far we have only examined the teachings on ecology of the Catholic Church in Asia. However, the "Great Sages of the Past," to whom *LS* refers (no. 47) and from whom we can acquire "true wisdom, as the fruit of self-examination and generous encounter between persons" (no. 47) include also the spiritual masters of Asian religions. *LS* explicitly calls for a dialogue and collaboration among religions for the defence of the earth, a call repeatedly made by the FABC: "The majority of people living on our planet profess to be believers. This should spur religions to dialogue among themselves for the sake of protecting nature, defending the poor, and building networks of respect and fraternity" (no. 201).

Among the many causes of the ecological crisis, Pope Francis highlights what he calls "the globalization of the technocratic paradigm" which "exalts the concept of a subject who, using logical and rational procedures, progressively approaches and gains control over an external object" (no. 106). In this case, the "external object" is the material world, which technocracy tries to dominate by means of "a technique of possession, mastery and transformation" (no. 106). At the basis of this technocratic

paradigm is the conception of the material world and everything existing therein as valuable only to the extent that they can be made to serve human needs and wants and not as valuable in themselves, by their independent existence and autonomous value. This conception is called “excessive anthropocentrism” (no. 1)

To counter the technocratic paradigm and excessive anthropocentrism the pope develops philosophical and theological arguments derived from the Christian sources (chapter 2). Starting from the Christian belief in God’s creation of nature or the universe, pope Francis affirms the existence of a “universal communion”: “All of us are linked by unseen bonds and together form a kind of universal family, a sublime communion which fills us with a sacred, affectionate and humble respect” (no. 89). The pope goes on to emphasize that “universal communion” includes the material universe: “Everything is related, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each of his creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth” (no. 92).

Here I would like to extend Francis’s reflections on universal communion by invoking the Buddhist and Daoist perspectives. Admittedly, Pope Francis’s belief in a personal God and in God’s creative act is fundamentally different from the non-theistic and non-creationist stance of Buddhism and Daoism. Yet, in spite of this difference, these two Asian religious traditions offer insights into reality that strengthen the pope’s position. In brief, the technocratic paradigm can be countered by the Buddhist notion of “interdependent/dependent co-arising/origination” (Sanskrit: *pratītyasamutpāda*) and excessive anthropocentrism by the Daoist view of universal harmony.

By “interdependent/dependent co-arising/origination” is meant that all things (*dharma*) do not exist as independent and permanent realities or “selves,” but are constantly changing or “co-arising” (*samutpāda*) dependently (*pratītya*) on other things, which are also co-arising dependently on the things that co-arise dependently on

them. The doctrine of interdependent origination is expressed in the following terse formula: “When this is, that is; This arising, that arises; When this is not, that is not; This ceasing, that ceases.”¹⁴ As a result of interdependent origination there is nothing that is permanent (*anicca*), nothing that is substantial (*anattā*). The Buddha’s primary interest is practical: he wants to trace suffering (*dukkha*) back to a chain of twelve causes (the twelve *nidāna*) the last of which is lack of knowledge (*avidyā*) and to show that by abolishing these twelve causal links a person can break the cycle of rebirth (*samsāra*) and reach enlightenment (*nirvāna*), which alone is not subject to interdependent origination.

There is no need to go in detail here into the Buddha’s teaching on the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path toward enlightenment which are undergirded by the ontological principle of interdependent origination. My purpose is simply to argue that the Buddhist concept of interdependent origination implicitly rejects the technocratic paradigm which views the world in terms of subject-object for the purpose of domination and exploitation. Interdependent origination—as the term implies—affirms universal and mutual conditioning among all things. No being can exist without other: one person without all other persons; humanity without ecology; and vice versa ecology without humanity.

This interdependence of all things is dramatically expressed by the Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh. In a short post titled *Clouds in Each Paper* on Awakin.org March 25, 2000, he writes:

If you are a poet, you will see clearly that there is a cloud floating in this sheet of paper. Without a cloud, there will be no rain; without rain, the trees cannot grow: and

¹⁴For a helpful explanation of “interdependent origination” in Buddhist thought, see Richard Combrich, *What the Buddha Thought* (London: Equinox, 2009), 129-143. and Paul Williams with Anthony Tribe, *Buddhist Thought: A Complete Introduction to the Indian Tradition* (London: Routledge, 2000), 62-72. .

without trees, we cannot make paper. The cloud is essential for the paper to exist. If the cloud is not here, the sheet of paper cannot be here either. So we can say that the cloud and the paper inter-are.

"Interbeing" is a word that is not in the dictionary yet, but if we combine the prefix "inter" with the verb "to be", we have a new verb, inter-be. Without a cloud, we cannot have paper, so we can say that the cloud and the sheet of paper inter-are.

If we look into this sheet of paper even more deeply, we can see the sunshine in it. If the sunshine is not there, the forest cannot grow. In fact nothing can grow. Even we cannot grow without sunshine. And so, we know that the sunshine is also in this sheet of paper. The paper and the sunshine inter-are. And if we continue to look we can see the logger who cut the tree and brought it to the mill to be transformed into paper. And we see the wheat. We know that the logger cannot exist without his daily bread, and therefore the wheat that became his bread is also in this sheet of paper. And the logger's father and mother are in it too. When we look in this way we see that without all of these things, this sheet of paper cannot exist.¹⁵

Because of interdependent origination humanity and ecology "inter-are." "Interbeing" is the only mode of existence possible, not only among humans themselves but also between humanity and ecology. The animals and the material world are not just "objects" for us humans as "subjects" to manipulate, dominate and exploit. Their value and worth are not measured by their usefulness to humans; rather they

¹⁵ <http://www.awakin.org/read/view.php?tid=222>. See also Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Wisdom of That Nhat Hanh* (New York: One Spirit, 2000), 233-252.

possess their autonomous value in themselves because they and we co-arise interdependently. Without them we cannot exist, and vice versa without us they cannot exist. They and we “inter-are.”

The FABC Theological Advisory Commission in its document *Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony* already cited above explains how in the Mahayana tradition the historical Buddha becomes identified with the goal he reached by destroying the twelve causes producing suffering, namely, *nirvāna*, the Ultimate “No-Self,” or Absolute “Emptiness.” It goes on to say: “The human task is to follow the example of the historical Buddha and to reach this ultimate state of emptiness, which is stillness, quietness and limitless rest, but the dynamic stillness which reaches out in compassion to all living beings still in the throes of suffering.”¹⁶

For arguments against excessive anthropocentrism we turn to the Daoist tradition of universal harmony. As mentioned earlier, the FABC regards harmony and wholeness as characteristic ideals of the Asian way of life. Daoism is both a philosophical school (*daojia*) and a religious practice (*daogiao*) that is distinguished from Confucianism and Buddhism (*fojiao*). The classics upon which Daoism is founded are the *Dao de jing*, also known as the *Laozi*, and the *Zhuangxi*. The defining concept of the Daoist religion is the Dao itself. Literally meaning the “way” or the “path,” the Dao refers to the proper course of human conduct, especially as taught by the ancient sages. It soon came to be understood as the metaphysical basis of the natural order itself, primordial yet eternally present. In its primordial state Dao is described as “nothingness,” null and void. But the Dao also manifests itself and becomes present in the sensible world through *qi* (literally, breath, steam, vapour, or energy). *Qi*, both energy and matter, is the basic building block of all things in the universe, responsible for movement and energy, and is the vital substance of

¹⁶ *For All the Peoples of Asia* (1997), 260.

life. Daoist rituals and religious practices aim at preserving this *qi* by combatting the forces of aging, illness and death. The goal, at once temporal and spatial, is to bring the various parts of the body back into unified harmony and thus to achieve immortality.

Again, it is not necessary to delve into all the intricate philosophical and cosmological speculations and alchemy of Daoism here. Suffice it to note for our present purposes that central to Daoism as a religious practice is the ethics of “noncontrivance” (*wu wei*). According to Zhuangxi, the Dao acts spontaneously in individuals, society, and nature. Similarly, humans must respect and submit to natural changes. In this way they and the world can become one. By contrast, contrivance should be avoided because it is counter-productive and contrary to the spontaneity (*tzu-jan*) of the Dao. The ethic of noncontrivance means that humans must not act against nature; rather human action, like the Dao’s, must be non-purposive, non-deliberative and yet continuously transforming, as natural as water flowing downward and fire rising upward.

Clearly, such ethic of noncontrivance and spontaneity runs counter to the kind of anthropocentrism that makes humans the centre or the summit of creation and technological domination of nature the goal of knowledge. Even though Daoist thought and practice are not based on the belief in God the Creator, they provide a powerful stimulus to “hear the cry of nature itself; everything is connected” (*LS* no. 117).

Going Forward and Further

In his evaluation of *LS*, Donald Dorr says that the encyclical “is an exceptionally important document, which will surely rank with the Vatican II Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World” (*Gaudium et Spes*).¹⁷ That is not a hyperbole, in light of both contents and methodology. In terms of methodology, the

¹⁷ Donald Dorr, *Option for the Poor & for the Earth* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2016), 436.

encyclical starts with a clear, accessible and accurate presentation of the scientific data on the ecological crisis, without which theological elaborations would be no more than abstract speculation. As mentioned above, *LS* offers a very helpful introduction to the ecological crisis and provides people with inadequate scientific education the means to articulate the causal connections between human activities—individual and corporate—and global warming. Furthermore, the fact that Pope Francis quotes the teachings of episcopal conferences is a welcome departure from the earlier view that they do not constitute a proper teaching authority of the hierarchical magisterium.

In terms of contents, again, according to Dorr, “Francis’s account of an integral ecology represents a major breakthrough in Catholic social teaching.”¹⁸ Dorr goes on to list eleven areas where such breakthrough occurs: a rich Bible-based theology of ecology; a comprehensive account of the major environmental issues; the affirmation of human activities as causing the ecological crisis; the strong linkage between “the cry of the earth” and “the cry of the poor”; the danger of the “technocratic paradigm”; the proposal of an alternative economy; the “ecological debt” of the rich countries; recognition of the contributions of local cooperatives and indigenous communities; encouragement to adopt ecologically friendly practices; emphasis on the need for enforcement measures at the national and international levels; and the need to pressure politicians to take radical enforcement measures.¹⁹

On the debit side, Dorr notes three areas where *LS* could be improved: the population issue, the theology of the “Cosmic Christ,” and an evolution-based theology of creation in the form of the “New Story.”²⁰ With regard to the Asian context, the first issue obtains pride of place. *LS* mentions the “reduction in the birth rate” and “certain policies of ‘reproductive health’” (no. 50) and views

¹⁸ Ibid., 436.

¹⁹ Ibid., 437-438.

²⁰ Ibid., 439-443.

them as ways in which rich countries try to avoid facing the consequences of their consumerist lifestyle on the environment by blaming it on the birth rate in the Majority World. The encyclical goes on quoting the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* of the Pontifical Council for Justice and peace: “While it is true that an unequal distribution of the population and of the available resources creates obstacles to development and a sustainable use of the environment, it must nonetheless be recognized that demographic growth is fully compatible with an integral and shared development” (no. 50).

In light of the demographic explosion in Asian countries such as India, China, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Vietnam, and especially in the poorest countries of Asia, such a treatment of the impact of demographic explosion on the environment is little short of being cavalier. Perhaps *LS* is still hampered by the teaching of *Humane Vitae*, but the ecological crisis in 2016 is quite different than in 1968 and should have provided an occasion for a serious re-examination of Pope Paul VI’s admittedly non-infallible teaching. At any rate, what Pope Francis said on January 19, 2014 on his way back to Rome from the Philippines to the effect that one need not reproduce like rabbits in order to be good Catholics is a good place to start an open and honest discussion of “responsible parenthood.”

With the publication of *Laudato Si’* no one can accuse the leadership of the Catholic Church of turning a blind eye to an issue on which the survival not only of the human family but of the planet Earth itself depends. Pope Francis has sounded a clarion call for an “ecological conversion,” a call addressed to the whole humanity, but also one that Asia will need to heed and respond to actively and promptly because being a continent of the poorest of the poor, it has to respond to the cry of the Earth to make a decent human life possible for its own people.

***LAUDATO SI':* A NORTH AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE**

Daniel P. Scheid¹

Pope Francis' ground-breaking encyclical, *Laudato Si': On Care For Our Common Home*², garnered worldwide attention, not only from the Catholic faithful but indeed from every corner of society and on every continent across the globe. Here in North America, theologians and religious scholars from multiple religious traditions, in addition to lay practitioners from Jewish³, Muslim⁴, Buddhist⁵, Hindu⁶, and other faith traditions, reflected on and discussed the document, in order to find points of intersection and to amplify Francis' message through the lens of their own traditions. Truly, *Laudato Si'* can not only claim to be one of the first papal encyclicals addressed to, as Francis himself states, "every person living on this planet" (#3), but it is also a document the world actively engaged and celebrated. Yet at the same time, Francis' moral vision for understanding and responding to the

¹ Daniel P. Scheid is Associate Professor Duquesne University. His latest book is *The Cosmic Common Good: Religious Grounds for Ecological Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).,

² http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html. All citations of *Laudato Si'* will be in-text.

³ "Judaism, Climate Change, and *Laudato Si'*," Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life." August, 2015. <http://www.coejl.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2015/09/Judaism-Climate-Laudato-Si-8-pages-9-2-15-2.pdf>

⁴ Joseph E.B. Lumbard, "An Islamic Response to Pope Francis' Encyclical." June 18, 2015. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/joseph-e-b-lumbard/an-islamic-response-to-pope-francis-encyclical_b_7616762.html

⁵ Bhikku Bodhi, "Climate Change is a Moral Issue: A Buddhist Reflection on the Pope's Climate Encyclical, *Laudato si'*." June 19, 2015. <https://buddhistglobalrelief.me/2015/06/19/climate-change-is-a-moral-issue>

⁶ Sunita Viswanath, "A Hindu Reflection on Pope's Climate Change Encyclical." July 13, 2015. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/sunita-viswanath/a-hindu-reflection-on-pop_b_7777810.html

myriad currents of ecological devastation currently threatening the planet poses a radical challenge to the dominant forces of contemporary globalization. So in this article, I will outline three related themes of his “Gospel of Creation” (Chapter Two of *Laudato Si'*) that I think form the crux of *Laudato Si'* and its moral vision to protect the Earth, our common home. Then I will briefly sketch the moral vision of the regnant technocratic paradigm that Francis intends to subvert, convert, and transform. The prayers of many are that Francis’ message may reach us in time.

I. Integral Ecology

One of the most important contributions Francis makes in *Laudato Si'* is his promotion of an “integral ecology.” For many years, those active in environmental issues clashed with those in the social justice community. Those who advocated for the poor considered preservation of endangered animals and ecosystems the privilege of the rich, while those dedicated to protecting nonhuman life worried that economic development could never respect any natural boundaries. Francis employs the concept of integral ecology to insist that Catholics must not sever caring for the Earth and caring for the human poor, and indeed he synthesizes these concerns into one coherent moral vision. Francis begins by underscoring the centrality of interconnectedness: “It cannot be emphasized enough how everything is interconnected. ... Just as the different aspects of the planet —physical, chemical and biological—are interrelated, so too living species are part of a network which we will never fully explore and understand.”” (#138). Over and over Francis insists on a “broader vision of reality” (#138), to see the whole rather than just discrete parts, and to see humanity as part of a larger whole. Human beings belong, fundamentally and at our core, to the Earth and to the world around us.

Francis looks to the Scriptures for a model of integral ecology. The scriptures outline an interconnected world in which human

society exists not apart from but as part of a larger web of life. “Human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself. According to the Bible, these three vital relationships have been broken, both outwardly and within us. This rupture is sin” (#66). This scriptural basis for interconnectedness is the context for interpreting Genesis 1:28 and Genesis 2:15, two key passages about humanity’s relationship to the land that have coloured Christian ecological ethics. Genesis 1:28 states, “God blessed them and God said to them: Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all the living things that crawl on the earth.” Genesis 2:15 declares, “The Lord God then took the man and settled him in the garden of Eden, to cultivate and care for it.” Francis insists that rather than a license to use the Earth in any kind of work whatsoever, these passages underscore the intimate relationships among human beings, the land, and God. Because of sin, however, Christians have historically interpreted these passages as a justification to dominate the Earth and to act as the Earth’s controller. Francis calls on all Christians to reject anthropocentrism: “Although it is true that we Christians have at times incorrectly interpreted the Scriptures, nowadays we must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God’s image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures” (#67). Francis then offers his exegesis of Genesis 2:15, emphasizing humanity’s unique role but within an interconnected ecosystem of fellow creatures: “Tilling” refers to cultivating, ploughing or working, while “keeping” means caring, protecting, overseeing and preserving. This implies a relationship of mutual responsibility between human beings and nature” (#67). Interconnected relationships remain a guiding principle of Scripture: we cannot serve God or our neighbour without keeping in mind the third relationship, our duties and connections to the land. These three form a kind of stool, and only together do they

create a steady foundation: a stool with two legs, like a house divided, cannot stand.

This fundamental, in-built interconnectedness, envisioned and ordained by the Creator, is the basis for Francis' idea of an "integral ecology." Integral ecology means that we have to begin seeing environmental and social problems together, not as isolated problems. A passion for the poor can and should be intimately connected to a passion for the planet. These are not, Pope Francis says, "two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature" (#139). Integral ecology seeks strategies that combat poverty and protect nature simultaneously, without sacrificing one for the other. "A true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear *both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor*" (#49). In a similar way, we must preserve not just biodiversity and important ecosystems but also important and endangered human cultural traditions.

In fact, in some ways, the very idea of an integral ecology pulls us beyond limited ethical goals like "protecting nature" or "saving the environment." For Francis and the Catholic tradition, caring for the Earth is rooted in a faith in the Creator and in the goodness of creation. Integral ecology calls us not to protect a "nature" that is out there, outside the boundaries of our communities, our neighbourhoods, or our families. Such a nature or environment does not exist, because there is no nature that does not include us and implicate us. Nature is in us, and we are part of nature.

Indeed, Christians should expect a deeply interconnected world, patterned after a Creator who is in fact a Trinity. The Father, Francis explains, is the source of all that exists, the foundation of love from which all creatures come. The Word unites himself not

just to humanity, but to all creatures, all flesh, when he enters the womb of Mary. And the Spirit dwells in the heart of the universe and of all creatures. She brings forth new life for all. Francis remarks that the Trinity is a divine communion of persons, a model of relationship. “The divine Persons are subsistent relations, and the world, created according to the divine model, is a web of relationships. Creatures tend towards God, and in turn it is proper to every living being to tend towards other things, so that throughout the universe we can find any number of constant and secretly interwoven relationships” (#240). Interconnectedness is woven inextricably into the fabric of the universe, and modelled by the Trinity. It is the template for our own spiritual and emotional flourishing.

II. Communion of Creation

The Gospel of Creation that Francis describes in *Laudato Si'* speaks not only to interconnectedness, but also to the very heart of the Christian message: the Creator's love for all creation. This is what makes it “good news.” Creation, Francis says, “is of the order of love. God's love is the fundamental moving force in all created things” (#77). Francis detects elements of the Gospel of Creation in the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus lived in harmony with creation, and he often retreated to natural places to commune with his Father. “The Lord was able to invite others to be attentive to the beauty that there is in the world because he himself was in constant touch with nature” (#97). Jesus calls us to perceive the divine message of the Creator's love in each thing. Francis depicts a “Cosmic Christology,” affirming the presence of the Word throughout all time and space: “One Person of the Trinity entered into the created cosmos, throwing in his lot with it, even to the cross. From the beginning of the world, but particularly through

the incarnation, the mystery of Christ is at work in a hidden manner in the natural world as a whole” (#99).

Describing creation as the order of love offers the broadest possible view of the depth of God’s love. Francis offers beautiful reflections, both theologically profound and poetically rich, on the fullness of the Creator’s love: “Every creature is thus the object of the Father’s tenderness, who gives it its place in the world. Even the fleeting life of the least of beings is the object of his love, and in its few seconds of existence, God enfolds it with his affection” (#77). Because of the Creator’s love, and because we are made in God’s likeness and made for love, Francis calls us to love all creatures. In short, we are invited to view them as God the Creator might view them. “Because all creatures are connected, each must be cherished with love and respect, for all of us, as living creatures, are dependent on one another” (#42).

Moving beyond the interconnectedness of integral ecology, Pope Francis also describes creation in terms of communion. All of creation forms a universal, or cosmic, communion. “Creation can only be understood as a gift from the outstretched hand of the Father of all, and as a reality illuminated by the love which calls us together into universal communion” (#76). Francis takes us to the heart of what it is to be human—linked to all creatures, humans, the cosmos, because of our one Creator, who loved us into existence. Creation is not just the setting for the human drama of salvation—instead, it is itself a “splendid universal communion” (#220).⁷

III. The Cosmic Common Good

Francis’ vision of integral ecology and a universal communion of creation suggests that the proper scope of moral concern for the

⁷ Denis Edwards also uses the language of a cosmic communion and encourages us to “see ourselves as fellow creatures with others in the one communion of creation.” Denis Edwards, *Ecology at the Heart of Faith: The Change of Heart that Leads to a New Way of Living on Earth* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006), 165.

Earth, our common home, is to situate socio-ecological concerns within the context of a “cosmic common good.” Francis does not explicitly use this phrase, and in some ways his description of the principle of the common good reveals his perception that it remains a primarily human institution. For example, Francis sees the common good as based on “respect for the human person as such,” and it is oriented to “the overall welfare of society” and promotes stability and security within human society. Francis does focus on an ecological common good, for example on the importance of the oceans as part of the “global commons” (#174), and he describes the climate as “a common good, belonging to all and meant for all” (#23), but it is unclear whether the “all” pertains solely to humans or to all creatures.

The telos of a cosmic common good, however, a common good geared towards the welfare of all creatures, corresponds well to Francis’ Gospel of Creation in *Laudato Si’* and the “splendid universal communion” he depicts. Moreover, I believe it matches similar proposals proffered by Western theologians in North America. The idea of a cosmic common good may not be uniquely North American, but it does appear in a number of theologians from this region of the world, perhaps more so than in other places, and so in this way the cosmic common good may become a way that *Laudato Si’* is interpreted and received in the North American context.

The common good is a pillar of Catholic social thought, and the classic definition stems from Vatican II’s *Gaudium et Spes*: “The sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment.”⁸ The context for understanding the common good has shifted over time to become stronger and more

⁸ *Gaudium et Spes*: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, 26.

http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html

inclusive. Traditionally, the common good was limited to a particular political entity, like a city-state, and then later a nation-state. The growing interdependence of nations and peoples is now a sizable factor in the everyday lives of persons, and so Catholic social teaching now understands the common good in a global sense, as applying to all humanity. Benedict XVI voiced this global vision of the common good well: “In an increasingly globalized society, the common good and the effort to obtain it cannot fail to assume the dimensions of the whole human family, that is to say, the community of peoples and nations, in such a way as to shape the *earthly* city in unity and peace.”⁹ The good of a people in one city or nation cannot be separated from the welfare of people in other nations, since their good is now bound up with each other; the city is now an “earthly city.”

Many North American bishops and theologians have been arguing for years that the common good, and the sense of mutual flourishing between members of a broader community, should be understood ecologically and apply to the flourishing of the entire planetary and indeed cosmic community. Thus the theme of the cosmic common good has arisen implicitly and explicitly in various North American Catholic theologians. Now, given the cosmic scope of Francis’ Gospel of Creation, Catholic social teaching ought to emphasize humanity’s role in advancing the cosmic common good.

A broadened vision of the common good appears in various bishops’ conferences. The U.S. Catholic bishops offered the theme of a “planetary common good” as a key component of a Catholic environmental ethic.¹⁰ The Dominican Bishops observe that “human beings are born, grow, and develop within a system that is complex, closed, and interrelated. Nature is the home in which they

⁹ Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 7.

¹⁰ US Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Renewing the Earth* (1991).
<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/environment/renewing-the-earth.cfm>.

live” (#17).¹¹ Therefore, “the maintenance and defense of the necessary ecological balance is the moral obligation of all” (#50). When human beings abuse trees, water, land, etc., they “act against nature, the human beings who need these resources, and God, the Creator both of nature and of human beings” (#51). While the Dominican Bishops generally view nonhuman creatures as resources, they also acknowledge the Earth as humanity’s proper home, and they insist that a misuse of the Earth is not just an assault on human beings but also on nature itself and the Creator, to whom humans and nonhumans belong.

More prominently, a joint commission of U.S. and Canadian Bishops in the Pacific Northwest authored a letter entitled *The Columbia River Watershed: Caring for Creation and the Common Good* (An International Pastoral Letter by the Catholic Bishops of the Region).¹² This letter followed three years of intensive meetings with members of all constituencies, including members of the business community, indigenous groups, environmental agencies, government leaders, and interested people from all faiths. This letter speaks eloquently of the common good in this region, and in many ways anticipates much of Francis’ Gospel of Creation. Not only does this letter organize ecological concerns around the common good (and even explicitly discusses “caring for our common home”), but it clearly broadens the meaning of the common good to include nonhuman creatures. For example, “As we study watershed land, air and water, we become aware of other members of the biotic community and the traditions and insights of regional peoples of the land. We come to recognize more fully the interrelatedness of life and the relationship of different lives to the environment in which they dwell.” The U.S. Bishops, the

¹¹ Dominican Episcopal Conference. [*Pastoral Letter on the Relationship of Human Beings to Nature*](#).

¹²

http://www.thewsc.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=38&Itemid=67/

Dominican Bishops, and the bishops of the Columbia River Watershed focus on the interrelatedness of life, the common home of humans and nonhumans on the Earth and in their particular bioregion, and thus a common good that is planetary and even cosmic.

The theme of a cosmic common good appears more directly in multiple North American theologians as well. Jame Schaefer points to the interconnectedness of humans with the rest of the planet as justification for expanding the principles of Catholic social thought:

[The fact] that our species is interconnected materially with other species cannot be denied in light of evolutionary and molecular biological findings. That our species is interconnected with other species, the land, air, and water in ecosystems is well documented by ecosystem science.¹³

Given our shared evolutionary history, and the myriad connections between human and nonhuman well-being, Schaefer queries whether the principles of Catholic social thought are “sufficient when they are exclusively centered on the human common good? Are they too centered on valuing the human intrinsically while only valuing other species and biological systems instrumentally for how they can be used to achieve the human common good?”¹⁴ Schaefer draws on various Catholic theologies of creation to argue that the planetary common good should really be understood as a cosmic common good.¹⁵ Schaefer defines the internal common good of creation as the “internal sustainability and integrity of the

¹³ Jame Schaefer, “Environmental Degradation, Social Sin, and the Common Good,” in *God, Creation, and Climate Change*, ed. Richard Miller (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 2010), 84.

¹⁴ Jame Schaefer, “Solidarity, Subsidiarity, and Option for the Poor: Extending Catholic Social Teaching in Response to the Climate Crisis,” in *Confronting the Climate Crisis: Catholic Theological Perspectives*, ed., Jame Schaefer (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2012), 409.

¹⁵ She draws specifically on Thomas Aquinas to argue for a cosmic common good. See Schaefer, “Environmental Degradation,” 81.

universe,”¹⁶ while she understands the planetary common good as “a life-sustaining and flourishing planet.”¹⁷

Similarly, John Hart argues that “‘common good’ understandings should be extended to nonhuman creation.”¹⁸ Hart points to the human experience of a “commons,” such as a village commons. A commons suggests not only nearness to one another and a setting in which people meet their material needs, but also a sense of shared life together. The commons expresses in another way the interconnectedness of an integral ecology, in which there is no “nature” or “others” out there who are not already intimately involved in my well-being. Hart then extends this concept of “commons” to the bioregional commons and then to the Earth itself. The Earth commons is a “shared space that is the source of life-providing common goods for all creatures.”¹⁹ Indeed, even the cosmos can be configured as a commons, “because it is the home of humans and all other creatures, and the locus of their interactive and interdependent and integrated relationships,”²⁰ and so humans should start thinking of our impact on and responsibility for “cosmic common goods.”²¹

Finally, my own work has revolved around ecological reorientations of principles of Catholic social thought centring on the anchor principle of the cosmic common good.²² If indeed God has intended for creatures to live in a vast web of interconnected relationships, then clearly “the sum of conditions” necessary for any creature to thrive ought to be perceived as cosmic in scope. In

¹⁶ Ibid. 81.

¹⁷ Ibid., 87.

¹⁸ John Hart, *Sacramental Commons: Christian Ecological Ethics* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 68.

¹⁹ Hart, *Sacramental Commons*, 62.

²⁰ Hart, *Sacramental Commons*, 33.

²¹ John Hart, *Cosmic Commons: Spirit, Science, & Space* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013), 222–223.

²² See Daniel P. Scheid, *The Cosmic Common Good: Religious Grounds for Ecological Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

addition, the Gospel of Creation points to a broader understanding of dignity than human dignity. Each creature, Francis insists, is loved by the Creator, for however fleeting a life that creature may have. Every creature then has intrinsic dignity in two ways: first, because it is loved by God and enjoys its own particular relationship to the Creator; and second because it is a member of the splendid universal communion of creation. Human dignity may still be regarded as something unique and precious within the planetary or cosmic common good; it remains true for Catholics that human beings possess a distinct nobility, given their capacities for reason and free will. Still, the loftiness of human dignity can only be understood within the broader category of a generalized *creaturely dignity*, which all beings possess by dint of being a creature. Thus the cosmic common good and creaturely dignity form a holistic approach to ecological ethics: the cosmic common good is derived from and benefits the myriad creatures that belong to the universe, and yet the communion of creation is also a good in its own right, with its own dignity and beauty. The common good is weakened when individual members try to steer common goods to themselves for their own private interests. In a similar way, the cosmic common good is something to which all creatures ought to direct themselves, not only for their own flourishing, but because it is a responsibility of belonging to a particular community. Just as members of a family may choose to sacrifice some of their interests for the good of the family, humans may be inspired to limit their own interests in light of the good of the rest of family of creation. When human beings refrain from polluting in rivers or oceans, or they replant forests and wetlands, or maintain conservation areas where nonhumans have space to live, it is obvious that this benefits the human community, but these are also worthwhile because they advance the planetary and cosmic common good. I maintain that the cosmic common good (and related principles of Catholic social thought that have been reoriented ecologically such as cosmic subsidiarity and Earth solidarity) express the moral vision of Francis' Gospel of Creation.

IV. The Technocratic Paradigm

Humanity needs this vision of interconnectedness, of a communion of creation, and of a cosmic common good, because the ecological crisis is not merely a matter of politics, economics, or technology, however vital all these arenas are. Rather, Francis directs us to the deeper cultural and spiritual causes of the ecological crisis. It is not just that we are burning too many fossil fuels or producing too much pollution. There are far-reaching powers driving us to do what many, if not most, recognize as unsustainable and dangerous. We must “look for solutions not only in technology but in a change of humanity; otherwise we would be dealing merely with symptoms” (#9). Much as a competent doctor would search for the true causes of uncomfortable symptoms, Francis eschews piecemeal and halfway measures and instead, echoing St. John Paul II, calls for “ecological conversion” (#216-221).

The first two paragraphs of *Laudato Si'* provide the crucial contrast that runs throughout the entire document. The opening words, “*Laudato Si', mi' Signore*” stem from St. Francis of Assisi’s *Canticle of the Creatures*, a hymn to the goodness of God and to the praise nonhumans offer God. This song, explains Pope Francis, teaches us that “our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us” (#1). The second paragraph of *Laudato Si'* sets up the problem: the Earth, who is our sister, cries out to us because of the damage we have done “by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her” (#2). The harm we have done is not accidental, but instead is a direct consequence of how we perceive ourselves in relationship to the Earth: “We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will” (#2). Francis identifies this with the woundedness of sin, and we see evidence of human violence not only in our human communities but also “in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life” (#2). Human

beings have forgotten who the Earth is, who we are, and how we humans are bounded to the Earth: “We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth (cf. *Gen* 2:7); our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters” (#2). That is the contrast: humans either (mistakenly) perceive ourselves as masters who may plunder at will without suffering any of the negative consequences; or we will regain the right mode of relationship, perceiving the Earth as sister and mother, as a fellow creature of God, and as one with whom our very bodily identity is interwoven.

The lack of the right moral vision has led to what Francis describes as the “technocratic paradigm.” The technocratic paradigm, borrowing from the methods of the experimental sciences, seeks control and mastery of whatever it encounters. The scientific method is “a technique of possession, mastery and transformation” (#106). The technocratic paradigm identifies the instrumental value of things, but it does not see the greater whole to which these things belong. This sense of power and control has fuelled the belief in limitless progress and infinite growth, which is “based on the lie that there is an infinite supply of the earth’s goods” (#106). For Francis, following the contrast established in the opening two paragraphs, this is not simply an error of judgement but is in fact an “epistemological paradigm which shapes the lives of individuals and the workings of society” (#107). Technology, and more importantly the paradigm of control that ignores reality and suppresses an awareness of interconnectedness, takes on a life of its own. This way of seeing the world shapes people to seek ever more control and growth, with little concern for the harm it does to the Earth, the poor, or ourselves. Francis introduces the term “rapidification” as an indictment of our so-called developed and more advanced way of life. Human society has always been changing, but our modern world seeks to accelerate this process, with no sense of a real purpose to it: “The goals of this rapid and constant change are not necessarily geared to the common good or to integral and sustainable human

development” (#18). Francis calls the modern world to question this paradigm, to ask deeper questions of what makes a good life, a healthy society, and a sustainable planet. We have forgotten who we are, who our sister the Earth is, and who God calls us to be.

V. Conclusion

Francis promulgated *Laudato Si'* at a critical juncture in human history, at a time when the Earth needs humanity to alter its economic practices, global political institutions, personal habits, and cultural traditions quickly. The threats posed by the technocratic paradigm continue to mount, and humanity desperately needs a new epistemological paradigm by which to see the Earth, one grounded in reality. Humanity needs the contrary moral vision of an integral ecology and a communion of creation, expressed through the concept of a cosmic common good. The technocratic paradigm has lost this vision, and along the way humans and the Earth itself suffer. Our sister, the Earth, Francis implores, “now cries out to us” (#2) to see what damage has been done and to live differently.

Of course, claiming the cosmic common good as a typically North American perspective does not adequately reflect the contentious climate, particularly in the United States, regarding the transition to a sustainable and just economy. Readers will know that the Republican Presidential candidate in the United States for 2016 has stated that he is not “a big believer in man-made climate change,”²³ and this position has permeated the Republican party.²⁴

²³ Brady Dennis, “Trump: ‘I’m Not a Big Believer in Man-Made Climate Change.’” Washington Post, March 22, 2016.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/energy-environment/wp/2016/03/22/this-is-the-only-type-of-climate-change-donald-trump-believes-in/>

²⁴ The previous Republican presidential candidate also expressed a distrust of climate science. Lucia Graves, “Mitt Romney Embraces Climate Denial: ‘We Don’t Know What’s Causing Climate Change’.” Huffington Post, October 28,

While Catholic bishops' conferences and individual theologians have long articulated a moral vision that corresponds to a cosmic common good and to Francis' Gospel of Creation, many lay Catholics have remained sceptical about environmental concerns like climate change. Yet, Francis has already had a positive effect, as 17 percent of Americans and 35 percent of Catholics report that Francis has had an impact on their understanding of climate change.²⁵ Indeed, already by 2014, Catholics were more likely to think that global warming was occurring and that it is human caused, and more likely to support initiatives like tax rebates for those who purchase solar panels or requiring utilities to purchase renewable energy.²⁶ The work of the bishops and individual theologians in North America promoting a different human-Earth relationship seems to be resonating, and faithful Catholics pray that the moral vision of the cosmic common good that comes through prominently in *Laudato Si'* may continue to influence Christians in the years to come.

Francis reminds us too that the fears raised in *Laudato Si'* are not just concerns related to the sustainability of ecosystems and species or the long-term viability of human civilization, though those are certainly enough justification to change our cultural approaches and attitudes to the rest of the Earth community. For Christians, there is a deeper, strictly theological danger: failure to see the communion of creation leads to a failure to perceive the Creator. At the end of *Laudato Si'*, Francis includes two prayers,

2011. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/10/28/mitt-romney-embraces-climate-change-denial_n_1063905.html

²⁵ Edward Maibach, Anthony Leiserowitz, Teresa Myers, Seth Rosenthal, Private: Geoff Feinberg and Connie Roser-Renouf, "The Francis Effect: How Pope Francis Changed the Conversation About Global Warming," Yale Program on Climate Communication, November 5, 2015.

<http://climatecommunication.yale.edu/publications/the-francis-effect/>

²⁶ "American Catholics Worry About Global Warming and Support U.S. Action," Yale Program on Climate Change Communication.

<http://climatecommunication.yale.edu/publications/american-catholics-worry-about-global-warming-and-support-u-s-action/>

one for Christians, and one for all those who avow a Creator. He prays, “Teach us to discover the worth of each thing, to be filled with awe and contemplation, to recognize that we are profoundly united with every creature, as we journey towards your infinite light.” For Christians, our prayer is that this vision of an interconnected communion of creation that is oriented around the cosmic common good can help heal the ecological crisis and can properly attend to the threat this crisis poses to our relationship to the divine.

**DE-PHILOSOPHISING PHILOSOPHY
A GIFT IN HONOUR OF RAÚL FORNET-BETANCOURT
ON THE OCCASION OF HIS 70TH BIRTHDAY**

**Helene Büchel, Marlene Montes de Sommer
and Elisabeth Steffens**

“De-philosophising philosophy”.¹ That, in a nutshell, is how Raul Fornet-Betancourt describes the ambitious goal of his endeavours. Put differently, one might say that his work aims to provide theoretical and practical liberation for the philosophies and theologies of countries in the so-called South from European domination of these two disciplines. His preferred means to this end are direct encounters between academic representatives from a wide range of different cultures.² This objective, which the intercultural philosopher has impressively and convincingly pursued with great success over some thirty years, has triggered awareness for self-determined paths out of material poverty and oppression.

Hyondok Choe, a philosopher from South Korea, describes Fornet-Betancourt’s influence in Asia as follows:

It is mostly philosophers in India and South Korea who have collaborated with Raul. In South Korea there was a philosophical current which explored the issue of overcoming colonialism within philosophy—colonialism in the sense of philosophy’s loss of itself. There were certain aspects of

¹ Raúl Fornet-Betancourt, *La Philosophie interculturelle. Penser autrement le monde*, Paris 2011, p. 169.

² See Antônio Sidekum and Paulo Hahn (eds.), *Pontes interculturais*, São Leopoldo 2007; Elisabeth Steffens and Annette Meuthrath (eds.), *Utopia hat einen Ort. Beiträge für eine interkulturelle Welt aus vier Kontinenten. Festschrift für Raúl Fornet-Betancourt*, Frankfurt a. M. 2006. His work is accessible in the online catalogue of the special library “mikado” (Goethestr. 43, 52064 Aachen, Germany, www.mikado-ac.info).

problem awareness that were common to these South Korean philosophers and Raul's intercultural philosophy. As a result, several Korean philosophers began to take an interest in Raul's intercultural philosophy and this led to the founding of a Korean Society for Intercultural Philosophy. Raul's intercultural philosophy is one of the primary sources of inspiration for the self-discovery of Korean philosophy and criticism of its power structures as well as for the creation of a philosophy of liberation in Korea and Asia.

To pay tribute to Raul Fornet-Betancourt's visionary work and to thank him for the ground-breaking food for thought he has given us we asked other of his colleagues to answer the following questions:

When did you get to know Raul Fornet-Betancourt?

Which thesis in his philosophical work impresses you most?

What value do you think his work has for your continent?³

Here are their answers:

I. Anne Béatrice Faye (Burkina Faso, West Africa):

From Abidjan to Barcelona: a Pilgrimage with a Visionary

I became indirectly acquainted with Professor Raul Fornet-Betancourt, given my interest in the question of inculturation and the dialogue between faith and tradition in the contemporary African context.⁴ It was in 2007, at the time of a colloquium

³ This article will be published in different reviews in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America. We wish to thank Dr. Marco Moerschbacher, Head of the Africa Department at the Institute of Missiology in Aachen, for facilitating contact with African reviews. We also want to thank Robert Bryce B.A. for his translations.

⁴ Anne Béatrice Faye is a Senegalese nun of the Congrégation des Sœurs de l'Immaculée Conception de Castres. She studied philosophy at the Catholic Faculty of Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of Congo. As a Doctor of philosophy from the Université Cheik Anta Diop of Dakar, Senegal, Anne

organized in Abidjan for the fiftieth anniversary of the work entitled *Des Prêtres Noirs S'interrogent*.⁵ On the occasion of this colloquium, Marco Moerschbacher took part both as participant and as representative of Missio. The authors of this collective work (black priests) were aware of the necessity of changing from European-style Christianity to an authentically African Christianity. I simply remember that after my intervention, entitled “When Africa questions African Christianity,” Marco asked me if I knew Raul. After responding in the negative, I listened to him attentively, feeling called to know more about this man. I then searched to find out who he was.

It was thus that I happened upon one of his works, entitled “Reflexiones de Raúl Fornet-Betancourt sobre el concepto de interculturalidad”. Managing the Spanish as well as I could, I read it in order to understand what he means by intercultural philosophy starting from these three terms: cultural, inculturation, interculturality. I also discovered that Raúl had organized a series of colloquia of intercultural philosophy the Acts of which are published in Germany. It is in this context that he invited me in 2008 to Barcelona, in order to participate in reflecting upon “the meaning of the land in cultures”. It is there that we met each other for the first time.

Certain encounters are memorable when one attaches to them precise times, well known places, and actual men and women, rather than an imaginary and fleeting dream world. I had known Raul one year before the 2009 United Nations Climate Change

Beatrice Faye is interested in the question of the promotion of women in an African context. She participates in the *International Congress of Intercultural Philosophy*. She has been a member of the academic Council of Dr. Marco Moerschbacher since 2012, assigned to the forum on Africa with the Ecumenical Institute Al mowafaqa of Rabat, Morocco. She is also a professor of philosophy at the same institute. After a five-year assignment in Rome as a member of the General Team of the Institute, she was assigned to Burkina Faso in October 2013 for the formation of young people. (cicbeafaye@yahoo.fr)

⁵ Albert Abble & Presence africaine, *Les pretres noirs s'interrogent*, Paris 1956.

Conference which took place in Copenhagen Denmark from 7 to 18 December. Six years later, the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference was held in Paris with the same concerns. I would like to recount what we shared with Raul on the subject of our land.

We must ask ourselves to what extent we desire to build a viable future for all. Change to a happy sobriety incites us to stop pillaging, polluting, and blindly risking our land to drought. In order to do this we must radically alter our behaviours and our priorities. We propose to replace the present indicators of the Gross National Product and the Gross Domestic Product with those of an ecological stamp that are in solidarity with an ecological time and place. These indicators would take into account each situation and way of life, from the poorest to the richest, no longer taking into account the average wealth of a country which, in itself, indicates little. Because when we pollute the land that is our mother, we pollute ourselves; when we destroy it we destroy ourselves and LIFE. Of course we are capable of building a better world even if it isn't "the best of all possible worlds". It is up to us to be vigilant!⁶

What I remember of Raul's personality is his sobriety and wisdom accompanied by his ever-serene smile. Thanks to him I was quickly able to join the research group as much on the side of North-South dialogue as of intercultural philosophy. Since then, we have met in Porto Alegre in 2010, in Germany in 2012, and most recently in San Domingo in 2015.

⁶ Anne Béatrice Faye, "Le sens de la terre dans la culture africaine: « penser comme une terre-mère » figure écologique pour notre temps", in: Raúl Fornet-Betancourt (ed.), *The place 'Earth' occupies in the various cultures. A Dialogue between cosmologies in the face of ecological challenge. Proceedings of the XIII International Seminars of the North-South-Dialogue*, Denktraditionen im Dialog: Studien zur Befreiung und Interkulturalität, vol. 29, Barcelona 2008, p. 43-55.

*An intercultural philosophy, a crossroad of experiences,
cultures and philosophies*

It is accepted today that interculturality is a major preoccupation of the current world. The mixing of peoples, however enriching, often weakens cultures and societies. To want to summarize Raul's work as an international figure of intercultural philosophy seems pretentious. His thought has the merit of bringing the most consistent first philosophy of interculturality through an engaged intercultural philosophy.⁷ To succeed in describing this philosophy, the principal objective of which is dialogue between cultures, it was necessary to decentralize the Eurocentric tradition of philosophy. As he himself says: "De-philosophizing philosophy" means to liberate it from the prison where the present hegemonic tradition has locked it up, namely the Eurocentric tradition of the West."⁸ The message is clear: to integrate the plurality in the sharing and reflection that lead to seeking and finding communal responses that are rich from the encounter with multiple and diverse singularities. Starting from a personal or real-life experience obliges, in order to "validate" it, confronting it with others in order to see what it receives in meaning and value for humanity. The thought of others permits us to depart from ourselves. In that respect, I would say that Raul's work is a treasure that can offer this space that attempts to bring plural responses to fundamental subjects that touch on faith, culture, development, democracy, life, society, ecumenism, and interreligious and intercultural dialogue.

⁷ Cf. Raul Fornet-Betancourt, *La Philosophie interculturelle. Penser autrement le monde*.

⁸ Raul Fornet-Betancourt, *La Philosophie interculturelle. Penser autrement le monde*, p. 169.

Three important pillars for Africa in Raúl's work: culture, inculturation, interculturality.

Given the difficulties social sciences have in participating in a decisive manner to the “development” and reconstruction of the continent, Raul’s critical approach to culture and inculturation, as well as his engaged intercultural philosophy, is important for Africa.

In effect, in an Africa torn between tradition and modernity, Raul’s first pillar allows us to find the junction between the two. It emerges from his critical approach toward culture that this last is, to begin with, a context of life and concrete human existence. In a given culture, we always stress experience and the past. From this perspective, a culture is a source of meaning and a resource for action; it isn’t for all that only a patrimony to be conserved. It renders subjects capable of realizing themselves; it is a support for the praxis of liberty. It is thus necessarily characterized by a dialectic between tradition and innovation. It is an invitation to remain just as attentive to the evolving character of the culture with regard to both the subject and object of the culture: from an elitist culture to an anthropological culture, from a culture of works to a culture of life that is itself in motion. Added to that is the acceleration of history with the unprecedented context of globalization that obliges us to think cultural identities anew.

This critical vision of culture leads us to the second pillar, that of inculturation. True inculturation only occurs when what is being inculturated has really been appropriated by subjects who become capable of new practices based on their own culture. Cultural values have served as the matrix for fashioning vibrant societies in a certain harmony, because they carry within themselves traditional modes of regulation for a peaceful coexistence. A dialogue between cultures is only understood beginning with people acting and speaking from their respective cultures.

The third pillar which then proceeds is drawn from Raul’s thought, namely interculturality as project and reality. Dialogue

presupposes the non-absolutization of cultures, the capacity for critical distancing of each of its actors from within his or her own culture. Far from being locked in a sterile speculative register, Raul stresses, on the contrary, the most disadvantaged lives and struggles. More precisely, he invites us to take seriously the poor and culturally dominated minorities. He emphasizes the necessity of allowing oneself to be transformed by the contexts of social realities, in the same way that philosophy must expose itself to cultural diversity. Impassioned by the encounter between worlds, Raul poses intercultural dialogue as an alternative to neoliberal globalization. His thought aims to modify the course of history, to highlight suppressed memories and to restore flavour to the notion of utopia.

By Way of Conclusion

Thank you Raul for your openness to the other in his or her socio-cultural diversity. Interculturality as a research tool in Africa will lead us to:

- rethink models of development by taking into account African socio-cultural values
- invest in such cultural fields as: the knowledge and usage of African languages; conserve and promote the nomenclature of African cultural values, as long as they are of such a nature to further humanize people and society; take stock of the wisdom, knowledge and traditional technologies with the intention of reinvesting them in the process of development.

It is thus that your work is important to Africa.

Translated from the French by Dr. Marie Baird, Duquesne University

II. José Mario Méndez Méndez—Intercultural Transformation

of Theological Work: A proposal from Raúl Fornet-Betancourt
embraced by the Ecumenical School of Religious Sciences

I⁹ met Raúl Fornet-Betancourt “in Central America.” This statement—apparently trivial—is important precisely because it refers to the contextuality and historicity that mark the encounters, the exchanges, the knowledges¹⁰, the interrogations, and the options. Precisely, contextuality and historicity are understood by Fornet-Betancourt as determining ingredients of thinking, especially of a thinking which seeks to take charge of reality.

The context, as he has asserted, is much more than geography and landscape: It is primarily a confluence of memories. For this reason, Central America, more than a strip of land between the North and the South of Abya Yala, is a space in which for

⁹ José Mario Méndez Méndez is a scholar and deputy director of the Ecumenical School of Religious Sciences at the National University of Costa Rica. His research and publications address thematic issues related to intercultural pedagogy, the pedagogical challenges of religious diversity, and the history of religious education in Costa Rica. He is a member of the Intercultural Network, from which he contributes to give visibility to cultural diversity in Costa Rica. He is the author of the book *Educação Intercultural e Justiça Cultural*, and co-author of *Repensar la Educación: Aportes desde la Pedagogía Social y la Interculturalidad*. His articles cover topics such as education and cultural justice, pedagogy and its relationship with the pluralism of spatiality and temporality, and the intercultural transformation of pedagogical practices. E-mail: jmariomendez@gmail.com.

¹⁰ *Note from the translator.* The Spanish language has two terms, *saber* and *conocer* (*conocimiento*), which are customarily translated to English as “knowledge.” While “knowledge” may refer to mere rational speculation, abstract reasoning, and theoretical argumentation, the meaning of *saber* in the Spanish language also entails the act of reasoned wisdom, discerned intellect, informed insight, knowing through reflected experiences, common sense, and learning from understanding contextualized practices. This essay written originally in Spanish uses *saber* (singular) and *saberes* (plural) for the terms “knowledge” or “knowledges.”

millennia have converged and lived together peoples of different origins, carrying with them their own memories, traditions and knowledges. Because of its location, it has become a bridge for many human groups, a biological corridor of great diversity of life forms, a meeting place of cultures coming first from the North, the South, and the Caribbean, and more recently from Europe, Africa, and Asia. In recent decades, social and political conflicts also transformed it into a site of passage, of flight and arrival, of “assembly of ways” and walkers. It has become a space of great mobility of people who carry with them their distress, memories, and hopes. If one could only think about the more than 40,000 Central American children who attempted to reach the United States in 2015, largely unaccompanied, one would have an idea of the perversity that characterizes much of the “human mobility” in this region. During 2016, Central America also has become a passing route for more than 10,000 Cuban people, and for thousands of men and women coming from Africa. Central America is a “path” because it is a space of gathering and living-together, even when—for many people—this living-together is transient and conflictive.

Central America is home to a great diversity of cultures. However, dominant culture has developed effective strategies of concealment and social hierarchies that contribute to perpetuate cultural injustice which has, and continues to mark our existence. Dominant culture not only conceals memories but also legitimates, normalizes, and energizes social injustice. That is why Central America is one of the world regions with greater inequity.

Social inequality and cultural injustice have also been supported by decontextualized theologies and religious discourses that often deny diversity, as they often make distinctions between those who are “in the truth” and who are “in error.” Such discourses have encouraged missionary militancy and “corrective” evangelistic practices which, being at the service of colonizing enterprises, they sought to replace the spiritual traditions of

indigenous and Afro-Central American peoples with beliefs and practices considered to be “true.” Thus, the theological-religious violence merged with other forms of violence in such a way that until today, this region has become one of the most violent regions in the world.

The processes of colonization included denial and even the destruction of what was considered different, such as belief systems, world-views, sacred places and symbolic frameworks that had been for millennia a source of meaning for the inhabitants of the isthmus. But such a denial is not just something of the past. Violence against those who struggle for the rights of indigenous peoples are still currently prevalent in all Central American countries. The killing of Berta Cáceres, a leader of the Lenca indigenous community, which took place in Honduras in March 2016, and the recent persecution inflicted against the victims who struggle to recover indigenous territories in Costa Rica, are facts which expose the prolonged extent of extermination practices and cultural violence in our region.

The burning of a Usure (a Bribri ritual house) in Cabagra,¹¹ in February 2016, is just one of the many attempts to destroy the Bribri ancestral culture, and to restrain the processes of self-affirmation of cultural identity by the indigenous peoples of Costa Rica. In Guatemala, a country in which the population is largely indigenous, the aboriginal peoples remain politically excluded, economically marginalized, and culturally discriminated against.

Frequently, education has been and continues to be an important strategy for concealment of diversity, colonization of knowledges, and for inciting cultural violence. The official story transmitted in educational centres remains a “bleached” story, in which the pre-conquest and colonization events are presented only a [as?] preamble of the true story. ? Check! In official school programs and textbooks, autochthonous peoples continue to be

¹¹ This is an indigenous Costa Rican territory located in the province of Puntarenas, by the Pacific Ocean.

treated as objects of study and as museum pieces, not as living bearers of knowledge and memories that challenge us.

In the case of Costa Rica, religious education in the public school system continues to be, as was the case in much of the nineteenth century, at the service of official State religion, which suffers from an obvious inability to recognize and promote the human right to believe differently, to disbelieve, to change one's belief. Religious education, therefore, becomes a platform for curricular, pedagogical, and religious violence.

The persistence of an official religion of the Costa Rican State, and the emergence of new fundamentalisms continue to obstruct recognition and celebration of the cultural and religious diversity that shape us.

Since its inception in 1973, the Ecumenical School of Religious Sciences¹² adopted a critical stance towards cultural and religious violence, understood as a root-cause of other forms of violence (for example: against women, against children, against people with diverse sexual orientation, against migrants, against the environment, and others). Our school has expressed in many ways its commitment to overcoming all forms of discrimination based on cultural and religious differences.

In this context, from the setting of the Ecumenical School, we have welcomed the contributions of theologies, philosophies, and pedagogies that invite one to both contextualize knowledges and foster honest dialogue with reality. In dialogue with such knowledges, we have learned to trace, to make visible and to denounce the religious, theological, and curricular roots of violence affecting children, women, sexually diverse people, the environment, and the autochthonous and Afro-descendant peoples.

Precisely because of that, Raúl Fornet-Betancourt became an important partner in dialogue at the Ecumenical School. From this

¹² This School is a component of the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters at the National University. It is one of the few academic spaces for theological production located in the public universities of Latin America.

academic space, and in dialogue with Fornet-Betancourt, we have learned to identify the epistemological colonisations that prevent us from listening [to] diverse voices and from recognizing other ways of knowing, believing, and being by the side of others.

A large number of scholars from the Ecumenical School perceive that Fornet-Betancourt is someone who, by his word, but particularly by his disposition to listen and to friendship, summons and invites everyone to abandon indifference to all forms of epistemological, cultural, and religious violence.

Fornet-Betancourt is a person who displays the habit of interrogating knowledge—his own and that of his interlocutors—about one's origins, one's contexts, one's stories, one's motives, and about their interconnection with other knowledges. By doing this, he questions the pretension of universality of knowledge and belief, a pretension that may be strongly established in university institutions.

Being aware of his proposals, the Ecumenical School reinforced its disposition to dialogue, along with its willingness to listen and to create networks seeking to effect the intercultural transformation of the academy. Together with him, in July 2013, we have created the Interculturality Network (*Red de Interculturalidad*), which also includes members of the University of Costa Rica and the State University Distance Education programs, as well as representatives of various groups and cultural movements.

At the Ecumenical School of Religious Sciences, we have accepted Fornet-Betancourt's invitation to undertake a serious curricular revision of our programs of study in order to both, overcome in them the Eurocentrism that has marked for centuries the universities of our America, and ensure that the pedagogical processes generated from them are beneficial for supporting dialogue of knowledges and cultural justice. The reformulation of our study programs has entailed self-criticism, overcoming dogmatisms, and understanding of cultural and religious diversity as a possibility for learning and conviviality.

The approach to an intercultural transformation of philosophy and theology pioneered by Fonet-Betancourt has contributed to strengthen the capacity of the Ecumenical School of Religious Sciences to embrace the diversity of beliefs, knowledges, and forms to access knowledge, a capacity that has characterized the School since its inception. This approach has also encouraged our critical stance against any universalizing claim of cultural and religious traditions which, in themselves, are localized in their origin and development. It has also supported our quest for liberating alternatives to the tendency of neoliberal globalization to uniformity and homogeneity.

The location of the Ecumenical School of Religious Sciences within a public University has opened creative ways for a theological thinking that is not at the service of explanation and legitimation of dogmas and unshakable knowledge. Our primary referential point is not the churches or religious groups, but the extraordinarily plural map of religious beliefs, spiritualities, world-views, and practices that give shape to our Central America.

In dialogue with the project developed by Raúl Fonet-Betancourt, our School has strengthened its capacity to promote intercultural, ecumenical, and participatory educational processes in which differences do not have to be hidden, assimilated, dissolved or integrated, but recognized, promoted, and celebrated. In those processes, diversity is not seen as a problem to be solved but as an opportunity to increase learning. Therefore, the diversity of memories, knowledges, and contexts within which we learn and educate ourselves meet in those processes, and also within them we renounce religious, pedagogical, and epistemological dogmatisms.

From my perspective, the most valuable feature of Fonet-Betancourt's approach is that it is not finished: It is an evolving working program in which many different voices have found a place, and many others continue to be convened. This is an evolving project that is being built from the demands of cultural justice that challenge us today. It is a program not restricted to

philosophy, nor canonizes a singular thinker. On the opposite, it is open to all knowledges and to all people who—from their biographies, memories, and cultural references—have decided to make of dialogue the best strategy to forge a world in which all worlds may jointly fit.

Many people from Central America have embraced and are grateful for this program of interculturality as an alternative to the social, political, cultural, and religious violence that has marked us for centuries, a violence that continues to produce many victims today. We have welcomed this program as a serious invitation to revise--from the demands of cultural justice--the ways in which we live, interact, and learn.

Translated from Spanish by Dr. María Pilar Aquino, University of San Diego

III. Josef Estermann (Switzerland, Europe)¹³

When did you get to know Raúl Fornet-Betancourt?

In the context of my philosophical studies in the first half of the 1980s at the University of Amsterdam, I dealt intensively with Emmanuel Levinas and his thought; I published some articles on the topic and participated at a congress in Zurich organized by a

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common friend of Raúl and me. On that occasion, Raúl became aware of my existence; I didn't know him and his work at the time. In 1990, I went for eight years to Peru, a country where Raúl himself had made his own experiences and realized part of his philosophical career, resulting in a conflict with the authorities because of his outspoken positions. During the preparation of the first International Congress of Intercultural Philosophy, 1995 at the *Universidad Pontificia* of Mexico City, one of the speakers from Germany unexpectedly had to cancel his participation. Raúl contacted me and asked me to give a paper at the conference, thanks to my work on Levinas. The paper was entitled "On the way to a philosophy of listening" and was elaborated clearly in the spirit of Levinas, but also within the framework of Raúl's project to transform philosophy interculturally from the very principles.

So I personally met Raúl for the first time at the Pontifical University of Mexico, in March 1995. Since then, I've participated (with one exception) at all International Congresses of Intercultural Philosophy; and I've (being) [been] focussing my own philosophical position to intercultural and indigenous (mainly Andean) philosophy. Two years later, Raúl informed me that at the institute where he worked (*Missionswissenschaftliches Institut missio e.V.* in Aachen), the position of director was to be reassigned. And because my family was making plans for a new inculturation in the Old World, I applied and got the job. This was (the way) [how] I became Raúl's superior for more than five years.

Which thesis in his philosophical work impresses you the most?

Above any philosophical position, I've been impressed from the very beginning by Raúl's congruency between his socio-political and ethical commitment, on the one hand, and his philosophical thinking, on the other hand. His intellectual passion and his unambiguous stand against injustices and half-truths, but also his

great capacity to give people acknowledgment and a proper place, independently of their education, social level or economical possibilities, impressed me deeply. He has always been travelling with hand luggage only and was reluctant to engage in small talk and disinterested in mere honour statements.

His thought is characterized by “intellectual militancy” and commitment for “another possible world.” But this clear option and unambiguous attitude has nothing in common with sectarian isolation or ideological hardening, but with the intention to put, during the dialogue, the best arguments on the table and at the same time to listen carefully and actively to other voices. His sharp mind and incredibly profound analytical sense hold the audience in his spell. The authenticity of the presented position adds one further element to a personality which is able to put a considerable weight—in spite of his physical lightweight—on the balance of intellectual debate from which nobody can withdraw. I’ve also always been impressed by the incredible cadence of his publications, his gigantic editorial work and, last but not least, the efforts—for most of us invisible—to raise funds in order to realize conferences, congresses, workshops and book projects. With all this, Raúl Fornet-Betancourt has moved mountains and joined people from all over the world at one and the same table. He not only talks about interculturality, but tries to put it into practice again and again.

What value do you think his work has for Europe?

The project of an intercultural transformation of philosophy as it has been initiated and evolved by Raúl Fornet-Betancourt, means for Europe, and the Western world in general, above all a “healthy shaking” of its monocultural pretension of universality. Western philosophy becomes in and through the intercultural “polylogue” just one of the participants and has to renounce the role of arbiter or even guardian of the truth. And this does mean that European

philosophy has to understand itself just as contextual “Western” philosophy. Secondly, the value of the work of Raúl Fornet-Betancourt for Europe has to do with a process of getting aware of their own suppressed, excluded, invisible and declassified positions [which] disappeared under the dominant mainstream of Western philosophy. The treasure of alterity and heterodoxy within European cultural history has to be dug up, an endeavour Raúl has contributed to by several publications on popular philosophy and the role of women in the philosophical enterprise. Thirdly, Europe has to confront seriously the reproach of still holding Eurocentric and neo-colonial positions, if it doesn’t want to find itself in the function of being a servant of imperial globalization of transnational companies and speculative capital.

BOOK REVIEWS

Cyril Orji, “*A Semiotic Approach to the Theology of Inculturation*. Eugene OR, Pickwick Publications, 2015. ISBN 13:978-1-4982-0074-5. Foreword by Dennis M. Doyle xviii+199 pp + Bibliography and Index pp.120-217.

Orji’s fine and important effort at deepening our understanding of inculturation by engaging semiotics offers many challenges. To his great credit he identifies how western theologians didn’t miss the boat but really never got on the boat when it comes to inculturation. Many are still locked in what I call unconscious intellectual colonialism. Orji should be applauded for bringing together the foundational thoughts of great semiotic scholars with clarity, accuracy and insight. But, he also prompts one to ponder whether his choice of so many western thinkers as dialogue partners is itself the effect of an unconscious intellectual colonialism on him. In the end, one wonders whether the text is addressed to Western or non-Western Theologians. Nonetheless, Orji’s text calls into question many theological assumptions by showing how important semiotics is to the theological enterprise, especially in foundations and communications.

The text takes on four central themes. The first of these affirms that the church is always cultural and therefore theology is contextual. Pluralism will by necessity mark ecclesial life. Hence semiotics! Orji sees this science as well equipped to engage differing meaning systems which express experienced faith. The second of these themes attempts to illustrate how semiotics can actually contribute to the theological enterprise and specifically in the challenge of inculturation. Here, with great success, Orji explores the work of Jean-Marc Ela. His effort would have been enhanced had he attended more to the work of the important Nigerian theologian E. Uzukwu. The third theme (developed in chapters 2 and 3) focus on the mediating role of language in religious discourse and how group and individual identity are social constructions. Herein he embraces the Sapir-Whorf historical

linguistic tradition. This section of the text is of great value in underscoring the absolutely crucial role language plays in all thinking. The fourth theme takes up the semiotic approach of Pierce-Geertz-Lonergan to suggest a theology which undertakes cultural analysis which is both marked by interpretation and liberation. Geertz is the key figure in Orji's assumptions about culture and its operations. It would have been interesting if V. Turner had been brought more to the forefront. Perhaps Orji would have had a more profound understanding of ritual in the dynamics of culture.

In the last part of his text, Orji offers 10 habits which will well equip anyone engaged in inculturation. Habit One, Avoid Classicism; Habit Two, Beware of the Dangers of One Single Story-Narratives; Habit Three, Broaden Your Horizon; Habit Four, Seek Higher Viewpoint; Habit Five, Always Differentiate [Consciousness]; Habit Six, Foster Spiritual and Cultural Development; Habit Seven, Celebrate Pluralism; Habit Eight, Promote Christian Fellowship; Habit Nine, Be Creative; Habit Ten, Relish in Self-Correcting Process of Learning.

To me these habits seem to bring together many of the themes of Lonergan and Postmodernity and perhaps they make better sense not co-mingled.

Orji gives us a courageous text that is most successful. I look forward to his next text that engages more African theologians and thinkers and measures itself less against Western thinkers and thoughts. In my view, he needs to move more and more away from unconscious intellectual colonialism and become more authentically African. If semiotics really does count my mild suggestion makes eminent sense. For western theologians who read the text, it will raise great questions and open new horizons—especially how imperialistic we really are, unknowingly.

George S. Worgul Jr., Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, PA

Irfan A. Omar and Michael K. Duffey (Editors), *Peacemaking and the Challenge of Violence in World Religions*. Maiden, Massachusetts & Oxford, UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2015 x+242 P.

This book, an edited work by two respected theologians, Irfan Omar and Michael Duffey, consists of normative theological and historical discourses on the broad topic of peace or peacebuilding of five global religions: Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism as well as one indigenous religion, American Indian Religion. The organization of the book is quite unique: following each religion broadly studied by a scholar, there are feedbacks or constructive criticisms from scholars of other religions.

Each author of the six religions discussed provides a brief history of the religion with special focus on the theological development of the concepts of peace, violence, nonviolence, and conflicts. In addition, there are also analyses of the understanding of peace from the perspective of each religion and the doctrinal guide in the search for peace and conflict resolution. According to different chapters of the book, the social historical evidences of and political approaches to peace have often either conflicted with core religious concepts of peace or driven the approach to peace with ambiguity, thus advocating and influencing the promotion of principles like just war and aggressive defence. These principles have legitimated aggression in response to conflicts as well as speculated potential violent attacks.

The entire question of peace or peacebuilding takes a completely different dimension according to Tink Tinker—the author of chapter seven, “The Irrelevance of euro-christian Dichotomies for Indigenous Peoples: Beyond Violence to a Vision of Cosmic Balance”. According to Tinker the perspective of American Indian religious tradition on the questions of violence, nonviolence, peace, and conflict resolution is quite different from the perspective of many of the world religions reviewed. While the euro-Christian worldview might focus on “competitive

achievement” or combating violence with nonviolence, the American Indians’ worldview is “the pervasive cosmic/holistic harmony and balance” (p. 208). Moreover, this search for harmony and balance is community-centred rather than individual centred. In addition, the search for harmony and balance has a cosmic focus. At the heart of this search are the rituals or ceremonies that involve the individual and community usually with a cosmic focus. Tinker acknowledges that incidents of war among American Indians were more defensive than offensive. Moreover, the euro-Christian concept of nonviolence since it is purely anthropocentric is inapplicable to the American Indians who consider other creatures, including trees and vegetables, as cousins and siblings.

The one common thread, among others, that is pervasive in all the religions reviewed in this collective work is the historical or realistic presence of violence often condoned or even permitted by these religions, regardless of their unique idolization of peace and peaceful co-existence. Some of the authors either make excuses or express regrets for those acts of violence, including warfare, condoned or permitted by their religions.

While violence is indicative of the deplorable level of human vice condoned by religion, violence is simply scandalous and a betrayal of what the purest element of human experience, religion, should be. One truth that prevails from the different narratives of the history of peace and violence is that conflict is integral to human existence. We may never avoid conflicts, but we can choose how to respond to conflict. There are myriads of instances in the accounts of the different authors where members of the different religious communities have been able to ameliorate conflicts with successful peacebuilding efforts.

This book comes across as quite candid in its narration of the history of religions vis-à-vis peacebuilding in the society. For the most part, the authors do not try to sweep under the rugs acts of violence and warfare carried out by members of their religious traditions. Yet, they are not deterred to proffer the possibility of religions taking the high roads toward peace by supporting and

advocating nonviolent tools and means of resolving conflicts in society.

This book will make an excellent text for courses in universities and colleges on conflict resolution from religious lenses. It also can serve as a standard text for religious communities who would love to use the assets of their religious traditions toward peacebuilding and conflict resolution. Therefore, it is a book that is extremely valuable at the crossroads of pastoral, academic, and social activism. It is accessible to the general reader, but also sufficiently detailed and complex to provide constructive exploration on the broad and narrow questions of religion and social harmony.

Marinus C. Iwuchukwu, Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, PA

Salim Faraji. *The Roots of Nubian Christianity Uncovered: The Triumph of the Last Pharaoh: Religious Encounters in Late Antique Africa*. Trenton: Africa World Press, 2012.

The Roots of Nubian Christianity Uncovered is a study in “divine kingship” in pharaonic Nile Valley Africa buttressed by the ongoing practice of “divine kingship” in medieval and colonial Africa. It is a painstaking examination of archaeological findings in Meroitic-Kushite Nubia, in Greek and Roman Egypt, and especially in the areas of grassland/Sahelian Africa from where the pharaonic African civilisation emerged—spanning the Congo, Niger, Benue rivers that connect with Ghana, Malian, Songhai and other sahelian civilisations. It is a study of “ancient Nubia that boasted the longest continuous monarchy in human history and the building of the first royal superstructures in the Nile Valley: mound

tumuli the predecessor to the pyramid.” (30) It is a foray into African theology that appreciates the complex hybrid socio-economico-military and cultural interchanges; the redefinition of syncretism to accommodate the Christian while honouring the ancestral indigenous practices. Needless to say, it is a study informed by African American nubiological assumptions that prioritize critically the black sources to the regional civilizations. It is an African (American) inquiry into the complex Christianisation of Nubia in the 5th century prior to the 6th century religio-political mission initiated by conflicting influences/interests of Emperor Justinian and his Monophysite wife Theodora as narrated in the *Ecclesiastical History* of John of Ephesus. (39)

In this book Salim Faraji embarks on the ambitious project of finding answers to a thesis question, “Why and how did pharaonic civilization in the Nile Valley transition from its ancient religious past to Christianity in the first to the sixth centuries of the common era?” (xiii) And with specific attention to Nubian Christianity (a religion that is state-sponsored as opposed to the religion of the oppressed of the early Egyptian and north African martyrs, Chapter One) that Faraji argues is pre-6th century CE as testified by the King Silko (last Pharaoh) epigram, pre-Byzantine Nubian Christianity, Faraji addresses the gnawing question, “Was the character of early Nubian Christianity consonant with its indigenous, traditional Sudanese religious milieu or was it simply an imitation of Greek culture and Byzantine Christian traditions?” (33) These questions were posed in greater detail in Salim Faraji’s PhD dissertation, defended in 2006, and reworked for publication in 2008.

To arrive at intellectually satisfactory answers Faraji in *The Roots of Nubian Christianity Uncovered* adopts as the methodological assumption the priority of the local. This positions him to challenge and set aside the claim of the priority of Byzantium dominant in western historiography, a theoretical framework that prevented western historians from recognizing the priority of the local in the Christianisation of lower Nubia and upper Egypt. To critically address the historical, missiological and

theological questions, Faraji underscores the hybridity in professed Christian belonging not only of the indigenous populations but of rulers like Constantine and the Swazi King, of the interface between 19th century colonial Christianity and 5th century Noubadian Christianity. This appreciates the “historical development of Christianity...within the nexus of cultural encounter.” (31) It is comparable, according to Faraji and other historians, to the Constantinian example. Instead of proclaiming that victory came through Amun and Mandulis, the epigram found in the temple of Mandulis in Kalabsha proclaimed that Silko, “King of the Noubades and all the Aithiopians” was given victory by Theos (God). The inscription in Greek proclaims, “*ho Theos edôken moi to nikêma*” (“God gave me the victory”) (69; 86).

Drawing from the methodology of Vincent L. Wimbush and the historical-archaeological resourcefulness of William Leo Hansberry, Faraji lays high premium in the way (African) cultures and traditions appropriate the Christian Scriptures and advance agency of the African in the Christianisation of Axum, upper and Lower Egypt and Lower Nubia. Consequently, he appropriates the position of David Frankfurter (*Religion in Roman Egypt*) about the resilience and dynamism of “the traditional religion of ancient Egypt” that enabled it to be “recreated in the semblance of Christian idioms and symbols.” (xvii)

All in all Salim Faraji presents a compelling and scholarly work. He handles evidence competently to prove convincingly his principal thesis, the pre-16th century appropriation of Christianity by Nubian ruling elite. This is an example of not only how African studies should be done, but how African and African American theology should be done. This is a book for experts and graduate students in history, Africana studies, African Studies and African theology.

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Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí, The Invention of Women : Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997. 240 pp., \$54.95 hardcover, \$21.95 Paperback.

Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí's 1997 *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourse* establishes itself as an African premier for delinking African intellectual pursuits from 'Westo-centric' (Beyond Eurocentric to include North America) epistemological suppositions. I must highlight that my attribution of "premier" to this seemingly old text, proceeds from examining the text for its contributions to articulating theological anthropologies of African women, given the methodological shifts this work demonstrates as necessary for African studies and studying African societies. In my perspective, it portrays antecedent support to Walter Mignolo's 'decolonial option' for countering the 'colonial matrix of power' elucidated in his 2011 work *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*. *Oyěwùmí's* work should thus be retrieved and reread as a 21st century blueprint for a systematic attention (84) to the 'locus of enunciation' of concepts and codes for African intellectual work. Thus, 'situated knowledge' will create a delinking from the enthroned westocentric 'zero point', such as dispels the myth of epistemological (specifically western logic) universality. The text is purposefully addressed to academics of African studies and societies, employing as case study: Yoruba realities (Nigeria) versus Yoruba discourse, to depict the imposition of western gender categories on African societies and the resulting distortions in knowledge-production. Her thesis, mapped out in five chapters, contends that "Western conceptual schemes and theories have become so widespread that almost all scholarship, even by Africans, utilizes them unquestioningly" (x) The outcome of this is "Western dominance in African studies" (xi) such that "there can be no fundamental difference in scholarship among these practitioners of knowledge, no matter their points of origin" (23).

In chapter 1, *Oyěwùmí* surmises that the organizing principle of African societies is a different conceptual base than western biologic that derived the categories of sex/gender and race with corresponding social hierarchy. This “body-reasoning” as she calls it, is anchored in the west’s pattern of privileging the visual sense of sight (use of lens, worldview, eyes, and focus) over other senses unto a differentiation of human bodies in society (1-5). *Oyěwùmí* then demonstrates that Yoruba reality is organized by seniority as pertains to relative age, not gender, and privileges a combination of the senses anchored in hearing, as with the Yoruba talking-drum, not seeing (13-14). She points out that feminist discourse is caught up in Western gender frameworks to become “one of the latest Western theoretical fashions to be applied to African societies” (16). To demonstrate, *Oko* in Yoruba reality is non-gender-specific but translated as husband in anglicized Yoruba discourse becomes gendered male. Likewise, *Oba* in Yoruba reality is non-gender-specific while translated as king in anglicized Yoruba discourse becomes gendered male. The 16 pages demonstrating various gender conflicts in discourse versus reality, serve to ground the discussion of the “problems of Westocentricity in the determination of research questions” (24, 27) and the “marginalization of language (competence and vehicle of writing) in African Studies” (28). *Oyěwùmí* exposes this problem of Western hegemony in African studies by examining the knowledge-production process and results of Senghor’s Negritude, African feminists Tola Pearce and Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie’s Yoruba discourse, Bolaji Idowu’s theological Yoruba discourse, Kwame Appiah’s opposition of Afrocentricity and V.Y. Mudimbe’s claim to authority in African studies (17-27). In her words applicable across African scholars “knowledge about the West is cultivated over decades, but knowledge about Africa is supposed to be absorbed, so to speak, through the mother’s breast milk” (26). Hence, in African studies and in studying African societies, knowledge-production stems from Western thought rather than African thought with the implications of the distortion and misapprehension of African realities in African discourse. This unquestioned propagation of

western epistemological suppositions “at best makes it difficult to understand African realities. At worse it hampers our ability to build knowledge about African societies.” (30)

Chapter 2 concretizes the necessity for epistemological disobedience via language and oral tradition sourced deconstruction of the validity of Gender as an analytic category for pre-colonial Yoruba society; as widely claimed in Yoruba discourse. *Oyěwùmí* exposes both the Western male-dominant essentialist framework and the feminist gender framework as ideological tools that are culturally and historically bounded, such that their uncritical use for knowledge-production in African Studies and studying African societies erases African models of being. She typifies this via her (re)construction of the Yoruba world-sense based on seniority from relative age not gender. For *Oyěwùmí*, changing foundational concepts but writing in English makes indispensable, the creation of new foundational concepts to work with. For example, *Oyěwùmí* points out the dualism intrinsic to Western gender based on “a perception of human sexual dimorphism inherent in the definition of gender” (31-32). Thus male/female and man/woman concepts are produced from anatomical differences essentialized into distinct social body categories, ordered in hierarchy, and defined in binary oppositions such as privilege/subordination, norm/derived, public/private, superior/inferior, and powerful/powerless (34). This is a far cry from the Yoruba concepts of *Obinrin* and *Okunrin* making their translations as female/woman and male/man respectively a distortion of Yoruba reality. *Oyěwùmí* notes that *Obinrin* and *Okunrin* are both “rin” (human) without ranking of derivation, one from another, or assertions of hierarchy (33-34). In addition, the differences between the two are anatomical, pertaining to procreation and intercourse. They “...are not codified because they did not have much social significance and so do not project into the social realm” (42) as gender differences do in Western societies. Thus, *Oyěwùmí* creates new categories of *anamale*, *anafemale* and *anasex* (34) to write about pre-colonial Yoruba reality in English without imposing Western gender on Yoruba society. She

entrenches her case by drawing on greeting gestures, ritual offices, lineage membership after marriage, Yoruba kinship language, cosmology, dual-descent, division of labour, engagement in war and hunting, lineage-based occupations, and child-rearing, to depict pre-colonial Yoruba reality as non-gender constructed being grounded in seniority. *Oyèwùmí* surmises: “in the written discourse on the Yoruba, gender is privileged over seniority only because of Western dominance in the conceptualization of research problems and in social theory” (77).

Chapters 3 and 4 attend to the display of ‘coloniality,’ from Western colonization into African scholarly writing, by tracing a history of invented traditions and inventing gendered-Africa; first, men in Chapter 3 and then, women in chapter 4. *Oyèwùmí* distinguishes three phases of ideological manipulation: “first history as a lived experience; second, history as a record of lived experience that is coded in the oral traditions; and, third, written history” (80). From the colonial period she says, “Men and women have been invented as social categories, and history is presented as being dominated by male actors. Female actors are virtually absent, and where they are recognized, are reduced to exceptions” (82). To elucidate the patriarchalization of Oyo-Yoruba historiography she interrogates the writings of the pioneer historian of the Yoruba, Samuel Johnson, who said, “my goal is to draw attention to the fact that writing Yoruba history has been a process of gender attribution in which kings and men have been created from oral traditions that were originally free of gender categories” (83). This, not only in history but as well in lived experience, as she writes concerning the inferiorization of females: “the very process by which females were categorized and reduced to ‘women’ made them ineligible for leadership roles. The basis for this exclusion was their biology, a process that was a new development in Yoruba society. (124). The formal establishment of British rule progressively caused the homogenization of Yoruba society to Western gender categories and subsequent androcentrism. *Oyèwùmí* discusses the key contribution of gendering Yoruba religion towards the reshaping of Yoruba minds; particularly the masculinization of the Orisas,

introducing Christianity, and Christian colonial education which used schools to create male leaders and female housewives. She asserts that proponents of Christianizing Yoruba religion such as Samuel Ajayi Crowther and Bolaji Idowu through translating the Bible into Yoruba and codifying the Yoruba traditions and customs entrenched the internalization of gender in Yoruba minds with greater ramifications since, unlike in the West, “religion permeates all aspects of African life” (142). *Obinrin* was thus reduced into women then to “women of no account” while *Okunrin* which was legitimized and instituted into male hegemony suffered the racist process (156). What got written down then was the Yoruba version of being Western, rather than Yoruba reality. The task of the scholar then is to recognize the attempted homogenization of cultures into the Western model via the object of thought and to know that indigenous resistance prevented the total disappearance of Yoruba societal forms, which painstakingly, may be retrieved to authentically speak of Yoruba pre-colonial history.

The concluding chapter 5 is *Oyěwùmí*'s attempt to create a pluriversal world rather than a Western-homogenized one. Discussing the translation of cultures, she points out how language translation from Yoruba into English imposes European values on Yoruba culture via “failing to acknowledge the epistemological differences between the two cultures” (162). Furthermore, “using masculine pronouns [in English] when maleness is not specified [in the cultural reality] communicates inaccurate information” (164). The absence of gender in Yoruba reality may also be misconstrued as “androgyny or ambiguity of gender” (174). For *Oyěwùmí*, attention to pre-colonial African language can be considered the first sure step to epistemological delinking from the coloniality of Western gender in African studies. Changing the research questions is her second step. Thus rather than ask in Yorubaland, “why are women victimized or subordinate?” or “What is the gender division of labor” which both presuppose gender in Yorubaland, one could ask first-order questions like “What constitutes difference in Yorubaland?” and “is the human body used as evidence in this conceptualization?” (178). Thus, the scholar would arrive at the

indigenous organizing principles and concepts, to later produce knowledge on the ethnic reality. *Oyěwùmí* surmises: “The greatest impact of these Western ideas regarding the primacy of gender is that they have made it difficult to present alternative ways of looking at anatomic sex-distinctions without pathologizing the female” (178).

This well researched work succeeds to justify methodological shifts for specialists in decolonial thought and researchers on African societies. The background of feminist, colonial, postcolonial and neo-colonial studies it requires, makes it challenging for a non-specialist reader to understand what is at stake. As concerns my perspective regarding a theological anthropology of African women, *Oyěwùmí's* work not only problematizes the gender category of “women” but also the divinity category of “*Theos*.” In addition, her pessimistic tone towards escaping western conceptual dominance in academe articulated in emphatic terms: “to think that one can inhabit the territory and then change the rules is a fallacy because the rules and the territory are not separable; they are mutually constituting. The one does not exist without the other” (25) compounds the issue of whether it is even possible to rightly talk about the “theological” anthropology of any female form in any pre-colonial African society. Walter Mignolo’s presentation of delinking thought as being a slow process without the assurance of a total dislodging from the colonial matrix of power due to the extent of internalization, still advocates the decoloniality of theology as foundational. This book deserves to be taken seriously by every African student in higher learning and research and its claims extends towards the reconsideration of several other unquestioned categories such as Original sin, Salvation and Eternal life.

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